Exclusion or Empowerment? A Critical Analysis of Women’s Roles in Somaliland’s Electoral Politics in 2021

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Abstract

This research examines the complex obstacles exclusionary and empowerment factors that impact women’s participation in parliamentary elections in Somaliland. By utilizing qualitative method with in-depth interviews with female candidates from the 2021 elections, the study delves into the intricate relationship between cultural, structural, and psychological exclusion, alongside educational, supportive, and strategic empowerment, in the unique political atmosphere of Somaliland. The results indicate that deeply ingrained cultural norms, entrenched political barriers, and significant financial constraints severely limit women’s political engagement. These barriers are compounded by psychological factors that diminish women’s political aspirations and efficacy. On the other hand, empowerment through higher education, robust supportive networks, and effective strategic planning emerges as key to overcoming these obstacles. The study employs theoretical frameworks such as Strain Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Resource Mobilization Theory to provide a deeper understanding of these dynamics. The implications of this research are far-reaching, suggesting that comprehensive interventions encompassing policy reforms, educational programs, and community dialogues are essential for enhancing women’s political participation. This study not only enriches the academic discourse on gender and politics in understudied contexts but also provides practical recommendations for stakeholders aiming to foster a more inclusive political landscape in Somaliland and similar settings.

Keywords: women’s political participation, Somaliland, electoral politics, cultural barriers, empowerment.


Introduction

The status of women’s political involvement has undergone significant transformations; however, disparities persist worldwide. As of 2023, women comprise 26.5% of parliamentarians globally, a rise from previous years, but the distribution is uneven across regions. European Nordic countries rank highest with 45.7% women parliamentarians, in stark contrast to regions such as the Middle East and North Africa, where the figure is 17.7% (UN Women, 2023). Additionally, women hold 22.8% of cabinet minister positions worldwide, indicating varying degrees of progress and areas of concern (UN Women, 2023). The challenges women encounter range from societal norms to economic constraints, which affect their political representation and participation at all levels, including the scarcity of women as Heads of State and Government (UN Women, 2023). This global summary emphasizes the need for targeted interventions, such as gender quotas and financial support, to enhance women’s political participation (US Department of State, 2023).

Somaliland presents a distinct case of women’s political participation, which contrasts with global trends. Unfortunately, women are significantly underrepresented in the country’s political landscape. Although international examples, such as Rwanda’s 60% women in parliament, show progress, Somaliland’s
situation is more challenging, with only two women elected to parliamentary positions in the last 19 years. This underrepresentation necessitates a nuanced understanding of the specific barriers and enablers in Somaliland’s context (Bade, 2023a; Jama et al., 2023). Research identifies political, cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors as significant obstacles to women’s political participation in Somaliland, while also highlighting opportunities for empowerment through mechanisms such as gender quotas and policies aimed at enhancing women’s socio-economic status (Abdi, 2021). The case of Somaliland underscores the importance of developing comprehensive strategies to address these barriers, including international support for electoral reforms that ensure women’s inclusion in political processes (Mohamoud, 2021).

The global discourse surrounding women’s political participation has underscored the need for deeper research on understudied contexts, such as Somaliland. While there is a general understanding of the obstacles and opportunities for women’s political engagement internationally, the specific challenges and potentials within Somaliland’s political landscape have not been adequately explored. This study seeks to address this deficiency by offering a comprehensive examination of the factors affecting women’s participation in Somaliland’s parliamentary elections, shedding light on the paradox of empowerment and exclusion in a distinct political environment.

Literature Review

Theoretical Frameworks on Women’s Political Participation

The foundational principles of women’s political involvement can be effectively analyzed through the prism of two primary theories: the Developmental Theory of Gender Gap and Strain Theory. These theoretical frameworks offer a comprehensive and multi-faceted perspective on the factors that impact women’s engagement in the political sphere.

The Developmental Theory of Gender Gap, proposed by Ronald Inglehart (2003), is a crucial framework for understanding the complexities of gender in the realm of political participation. Inglehart’s groundbreaking work posited that traditional gender roles significantly influenced political behavior, with women exhibiting more conservative tendencies and displaying less inclination towards political engagement than men. This theory is critical in examining the evolution of women’s roles in politics, particularly in light of changes in societal norms and cultural shifts (Iglehart & Pippa, 2003).

Empirical research has built upon Inglehart’s theory, positing that the gender disparity in political participation fluctuates as societies progress. Norris (2001) contends that in economically and culturally advanced societies, the differences in political engagement between males and females tend to lessen, and in certain situations, reverse. The applicability of this theory is especially pertinent for analyzing the current state of women’s political participation in postindustrial societies, where women are increasingly active and often lean towards more progressive political views than men (Iglehart & Pippa, 2003).

The Developmental Theory of Gender Gap is supplemented by Merton’s Strain Theory (1968), which provides a sociological perspective on the obstacles women confront in the political arena. This theory highlights the strain experienced by individuals when there is a gap between socially prescribed goals and the legitimate means to achieve them (Merton, 1968). In the context of women’s political participation, this strain takes the form of societal and structural impediments that restrict women’s engagement in politics.

Merton’s framework has been instrumental in understanding the systemic challenges that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in politics. The theory posits that societal structures, including cultural norms and institutional biases, create a disparity in the opportunities available for men and women, thereby hindering women’s political aspirations. This perspective is particularly relevant in exploring the obstacles women face in political spheres, such as discrimination, lack of access to necessary resources, and societal expectations that prioritize men’s participation over women’s.
The interplay of the Developmental Theory of Gender Gap and Strain Theory provides a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding women’s political participation. These theories highlight the multifaceted nature of the issue, encompassing cultural, societal, and structural dimensions. The evolving nature of the gender gap in politics, as outlined by Inglehart, combined with the systemic barriers identified by Merton, offer a nuanced perspective on the challenges and advancements in women’s political engagement. This theoretical framework is crucial for comprehending the current state of women’s participation in politics and for informing policies and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in the political.

Comparative Analysis of Women’s Parliamentary Participation Globally

Globally, women’s political participation has seen an encouraging upward trend, but this progression is not uniform across all regions. As from 2015, women have the right to vote in every country, a significant milestone since New Zealand first granted this right in 1893 (Cavatorta & Resta, 2023). However, representation in legislative bodies remains disproportionately low. On average, women constitute less than a quarter of legislators worldwide, a statistic that starkly contrasts with their demographic proportion (Cavatorta & Resta, 2023).

Regional analyses reveal stark disparities. In the Arab world, for instance, women’s representation in parliaments increased from 10% to 18% between 2012 and 2017, partly due to the adoption of quotas (Cavatorta & Resta, 2023). Contrastingly, in countries like Finland, women have achieved significant representation, even dominating the cabinet. These variations are often a reflection of cultural and societal norms that either facilitate or hinder women’s political participation.

Quotas have been a critical factor in increasing women’s parliamentary representation. Their effectiveness is evident in the improved ratios of women in parliaments in regions that have adopted them (Dahlerup, 2012). Gender equality policies, too, have played a crucial role. For instance, the implementation of gender-responsive governance can positively impact women’s participation (Bauer & Burnet, 2013). These policies ensure not just numerical representation but also effective participation in decision-making processes.

Despite these advancements, challenges persist. Women candidates often face deeply embedded stereotypes and cultural prejudices. In many societies, there is a lingering perception of politics as a male-dominated field, which can dissuade women from participating or be used against them by political opponents. Additionally, the underrepresentation of women in politics perpetuates a cycle where young women have fewer role models in political leadership, potentially impacting their political ambitions and involvement.

While significant strides have been made in enhancing women’s parliamentary participation globally, the journey towards equal representation is ongoing. Cultural norms, policy interventions, and societal attitudes play a substantial role in shaping this landscape. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for formulating effective strategies to promote gender parity in political representation across the globe.

Review of Previous Studies on Women in Somaliland’s Politics

The historical context of Somaliland’s political landscape offers a crucial understanding of the current state of women’s political participation. In the pre-colonial era, Somaliland society was characterized by a lack of a singular governing authority over all clans, with no clan assuming superiority over others. Governance was primarily managed by charismatic traditional leaders, who relied on unwritten social norms to resolve communal issues. This decentralized structure allowed for a form of social order devoid of formal institutions like police, military, or governmental buildings.

The onset of British colonial rule marked a significant shift in Somaliland’s political landscape. The colonial administration instituted a formal bureaucratic political structure, which notably entrenched gender disparities in political participation and decision-making (Bade, 2023a, 2024). One of the earliest manifestations of this disparity was the formation of the first advisory council in 1946, composed entirely of men, underscoring the systemic exclusion of women from political roles. Further cementing this
The post-independence era, following 1960, saw the emergence of formal politics based predominantly on clan systems. This period ironically coincided with the initial forays of Somali women into the political arena, albeit in very limited roles and capacities (Bade & Hared, 2021). Despite these developments, the political representation largely remained a male-dominated domain, with the clan system perpetuating male-centric governance.

The collapse of Somalia’s government in 1991 plunged the country, including Somaliland, into political turmoil. The clan system resurfaced as the primary organizational structure for societal governance and reconciliation. During this tumultuous period, women were largely excluded from key negotiating roles, despite their indirect contributions to the reconciliation process and nation-building efforts. Their participation was often relegated to supportive roles, such as encouraging clan leaders in peace negotiations (Bade & Hared, 2021).

In contemporary times, despite Somaliland’s transition to a multiparty political system, the underrepresentation of women in governance structures remains evident. The clan-based political system, which predominantly favors male representation, continues to pose significant challenges for women, particularly in national and municipal elections. The entrenched cultural perceptions of leadership as an inherently masculine domain further exacerbate the difficulties faced by women in gaining political traction. This systemic marginalization is further reinforced by traditional leaders who play a pivotal role in candidate pre-selection and campaigning, thereby acting as gatekeepers in the political process. The 2021 election highlighted these challenges, where female candidates faced considerable hurdles due to the prevailing clan political system and deeply rooted cultural biases.

To conclude the historical and current political dynamics of Somaliland present a complex landscape for women’s political participation. Despite the shift from a clan-based to a multiparty system, the lingering effects of traditional structures and cultural norms continue to impede women’s full participation and representation in the political sphere.

**Methodology**

This research used a qualitative design to gain a deep understanding of the complexities surrounding women’s involvement in the 2021 parliamentary elections in Somaliland, with a focus on the experiences of thirteen female candidates from the Marodijeh and Sahil regions. The study employed a purposive sampling technique to select seven candidates who had participated as candidates in the last parliamentary election in 2021. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, which provided participants with the opportunity to express their narratives authentically and in detail in secure and comfortable settings. The study’s ethical considerations were strictly adhered to, with all participants providing informed consent and understanding the study’s purpose and their rights, including privacy protection using unique code numbers to identify each participant. The transcribed interview data underwent rigorous analysis using thematic analysis, which involved several stages, including data familiarization, initial code generation, theme definition, and reporting. This method allowed for the identification of themes that shed light on the barriers and facilitators of political engagement, ensuring that the analysis was grounded in concrete evidence and reflective of the participants’ real-life experiences.

**Results**

This study conducted a thorough examination of the elements that impact women’s participation in the parliamentary elections of Somaliland, aiming to uncover the interplay between empowerment and exclusion in this unique political setting. Through the exploration of the dual themes of exclusion and
empowerment, the research provides a comprehensive analysis of the obstacles and facilitators that define women’s roles in the electoral process of Somaliland. The primary objectives of this research were to pinpoint and evaluate the primary obstacles that restrict women’s participation in parliamentary elections, explore the factors that could empower their involvement. The findings section is organized to reflect these objectives, categorizing the identified factors into themes of exclusion—cultural, structural, and psychological—and themes of empowerment—educational, supportive networks, and strategic empowerment.

Women’s Electoral Exclusion

Cultural norms and the prevalence of traditional elder dominance in Somaliland have had a profound impact on the political landscape, as they have effectively excluded women from participating in the electoral process. By virtue of their pivotal position in the political gatekeeping process, elders have often discredited the abilities and suitability of women for parliamentary roles. This exclusion is starkly illustrated by the experiences of the candidates, who have been repeatedly denied the opportunity to represent their communities due to their gender. One such example is reflected in the following quote from a participant:

“…..The elders did not represent us and they said women cannot represent our clan” (P3, Women, 45).

The respondent’s statement indicated that the absence of paternal support creates a hindrance that prevents her from actively participating in elections. She explained,

“…..My father is not alive, and there is no elder who can bring me victory” (P3, Women, 45).

The participant’s input illustrates the impact of paternal influence on elder decisions. The entrenched power of elders not only reflects traditional governing structures but also underscores the patriarchal foundations that restrict women’s political agency. This systemic exclusion is perpetuated through cultural rituals and social norms that prioritize male leadership, thereby perpetuating gender disparities in political representation. Societal expectations exacerbate the difficulties faced by women in politics, where politics is often viewed as an inappropriate arena for them. One respondent articulated the cultural bias that is ingrained from a tender age:

“…..The tradition has been highly influential in the lives of women, as is evident from its long-standing practice. From the time a boy is born, he is registered under his family’s name, and as he grows up, he is expected to pay close attention to his family’s needs and obligations” (P1, Women, 43).

Furthermore, the aspirations of women in politics are often suppressed by the notion that they should not surpass their male counterparts, as illustrated by one of the participants in the study.

“…..The competing women were surprised to find that the democratic system in Somaliland proved more resilient than the traditional tribal system that was dominated by elders and men(Ph, Women, 54).

These narratives highlight the pervasive influence of cultural norms that reinforce male dominance in leadership roles. Discrimination against women begins early in life and persists into the political arena, where they are often viewed as mere extensions of their marital families rather than as independent, capable leaders. While cultural barriers represent a significant obstacle, the structural challenges embedded within the political and economic frameworks further hinder women’s effective participation in Somaliland’s political landscape.

In addition to cultural barriers, structural exclusion plays a significant role in hindering women’s political aspirations in Somaliland. This takes the form of financial constraints and political gatekeeping, resulting in a political landscape that is predominantly male. The lack of financial resources is a major obstacle for women in politics, as they frequently lack the economic support required to mount competitive campaigns. This disparity is aptly illustrated by a respondent’s statement:

“…..I didn’t get financial help and no one supported me with a single dollar” (P1, Women, 43).

Another illustrates the extent of financial exclusion, noting,
“…..The election was characterized by the considerable influence of financial resources, where the quantity of cards a voter possessed was determined by the extent of money we could procure, primarily from external sources beyond the country’s borders (P2, Women, 52)..

These quotes offer insights into the commodification of votes that disadvantages financially challenged candidates. These financial barriers not only expose an uneven playing field but also bring attention to the systematic undervaluation of women’s political potential. Without economic resources, women are unable to connect with broader electorates or mobilize essential assets, thus restricting their presence and viability as candidates.

Additionally, the inflexible nature of Somaliland’s political system contributes to the marginalization of women. The persistence of clan-based politics and male-dominated decision-making processes systematically excludes women, as exemplified by one respondent’s account.

“…..Only two candidates received backing from their families, and even then, the support was not complete. The families told them that they hoped they would win but did not provide material assistance as they do for male candidates” (P3, Women, 45).

Another respondent recounted a harrowing experience related to political campaigning as a woman:

“…..The businessmen of my tribe prevented me from winning the election, claiming that women cannot understand their needs and cannot protect them in business dealings” (P7, Women, 44).

This gatekeeping is deeply ingrained in the political culture and is fueled by both traditional and contemporary economic factors that favor male candidates. Such obstacles not only discourage women from entering the political sphere but also perpetuate stereotypes that call into question their ability to lead and manage public affairs effectively. These systemic barriers, both financial and political, vividly demonstrate the intricate, multifaceted challenges that need to be tackled to promote more equitable participation. However, psychological barriers also play a crucial role in shaping the electoral landscape, further complicating the path to empowerment for women in Somaliland.

Psychological barriers significantly contribute to the entrenched exclusion of women from political participation in Somaliland, where societal discouragement and the scarcity of female role models perpetuate a cycle of disempowerment and diminished political engagement. The profound psychological impact of constant societal discouragement is evident in the experiences of women, who not only face overt opposition but also subtle forms of disempowerment. One respondent shared her harrowing experience:

“…..They oppressed me and trampled on my rights” (P5, Women, 44).

The available evidence underscores the personal and emotional toll of such exclusion. Another statement illustrates the psychological barriers imposed by traditional views:

“…..The elders oppress women to the community to vote telling them that the women will fail usual and don’t waste your vote(P6, Women, 54).

These experiences highlight the psychological warfare women face, where their capabilities are undermined before they can even demonstrate their leadership potential. This type of psychological barrier not only discourages women from aspiring to political roles but also diminishes community support for female candidates, thereby reinforcing the status quo.

The scarcity of successful female political leaders in Somaliland impedes the growth of aspiring women politicians. The invisibility of female leaders perpetuates a cycle of exclusion, as one respondent indicated:

“…..Women are not forthcoming about women advancing; few of them believe that women will emerge but generally women do not support women” (P2, Women, 52)..

This sentiment highlights the broader societal challenge of establishing a supportive network for women in politics. The dearth of role models not only restricts inspiration for potential female politicians but also influences the broader societal perception of women’s capabilities in leadership roles. Without visible
and successful examples of female political leaders, it is challenging for society to envision women in these positions, thereby hindering progress toward gender equity in political participation. While the multifaceted obstacles—cultural, structural, and psychological—present formidable challenges for women in Somaliland’s political landscape, investigating empowerment opportunities can offer pathways to overcoming these barriers and fostering a more inclusive political arena.

**Women’s Electoral Empowerment**

Educational empowerment serves as a crucial foundation for enhancing women’s roles in politics, providing them with the knowledge and confidence needed to challenge entrenched societal and political barriers. The educational attainment of female candidates significantly impacts their ability to engage effectively in the political arena. Many of the candidates expressed confidence stemming from their educational backgrounds:

“....Most of the women had knowledge. The reason they were running was that they were elite of women educationally and financially” (P1, Women, 43).

Another candidate, underscoring the role of education, stated:

“.....I can’t say that we were not educated but most of us as women candidates have learned something. If we had a woman who did not learn like men, we would have the chance to run for election” (P2, Women, 52).

These statements reflect the critical role that education plays in empowering women by equipping them with critical thinking skills and a broader understanding of political processes. Education not only enhances personal development but also provides women with the tools necessary to navigate and challenge the patriarchal norms prevalent in Somaliland’s political landscape. Education extends beyond formal schooling, encompassing awareness programs that help shift societal attitudes and empower women. One respondent highlighted the influence of supportive educational programs:

“.....No one looked in education generally and some men who didn’t even go to high school succeeded. The education is crucial yet other awareness including clan dynamics play crucial role” (P2, Women, 52).

The participant’s quote enriches this insight pointing out the disparities in educational requirements and success in politics. This indicates that while educational qualifications are crucial, awareness and training specific to political engagement are equally important. Such programs can empower women to overcome not only personal but also systemic challenges, fostering a more inclusive political environment. While educational empowerment provides the groundwork for challenging traditional norms, the development of supportive networks among women and community allies plays a pivotal role in fostering an environment conducive to female political participation.

The establishment of supportive networks, both within and beyond the female community, is critical in cultivating an environment that encourages and sustains women’s political participation in Somaliland. Despite prevailing obstacles, certain segments of the community, particularly younger men, have demonstrated their support for female candidates, indicating a shift in traditional perspectives. One respondent highlighted this encouraging trend, stating,

“.....Many young men supported me and did not hide their support” (P2, Women, 52).

Another candidate acknowledged the practical assistance provided by male allies, stating,

“.....There were very few girls working with us; the men helped me a lot, they brought me advertisement banners; they said to me ‘Aunt, you’re not alone.’” (P1, Women, 43).

These examples illustrate the potential for gradual societal change through the formation of cross-gender alliances that support women’s political ambitions. By engaging men as allies, women can dismantle long-standing barriers and foster a more inclusive political landscape.
Developing robust networks among women is essential for empowering female candidates. As one candidate noted,

“…..But we didn’t get support from the other women. Only a few women who are close friends and my neighbors supported me” (P1, Women, 43).

Another respondent emphasized the need for organized female networks, stating,

“…..We have a WhatsApp group, and we are connected until now, so we have to stay active” (P7, Women, 41).

These statements highlight the importance of creating support systems among women that can provide both emotional and strategic support, as well as build collective strength to challenge the status quo and promote greater representation in political processes. While supportive networks are crucial in empowering women, it is equally important to implement tailored campaign strategies and institutional reforms to strategically empower women and transform their political engagement into effective leadership and governance.

Strategic empowerment through targeted campaign strategies and advocacy for inclusive policies is crucial for providing women with the necessary tools and platforms to challenge existing barriers and establish themselves as viable political candidates. Effective campaign strategies are essential for all political candidates, but they hold particular significance for women in a context that traditionally excludes them.

Some women have demonstrated resilience and innovation in their approach to campaigning:

“…..I had a campaign manager, finance manager, language manager; my followers wrote a book about me; my campaigners were correcting me even if I was wrong; in all the villages, I have a separate campaign manager” (P1, Women, 43).

Another candidate emphasized her strategic focus on rural constituents:

“…..I concentrated on the rural people and sent a group of campaigners” (P3, Women, 45).

These statements underscore the importance of well-organized and strategic campaign efforts in building visibility and credibility for female candidates. By professionalizing their campaigns, women can overcome some of the inherent biases that hinder their electoral success and demonstrate their capacity and commitment as political contenders.

Enhancing efforts beyond individual campaigns necessitates implementing systemic changes to create a level playing field for all. Advocating for policies, such as gender quotas and electoral reforms, can significantly influence women’s political participation. As one respondent indicated,

“…..Something called a quota that we have been pushing for 21 years has made us delayed; later we all went to the campaign and announcement later, and we started the campaign only two months before the election; if we had gone earlier, we would have won” (P2, Women, 52).

Institutional reforms, like the implementation of quotas, are crucial to facilitate women’s entry and success in politics. By establishing quotas, a formal mechanism is created to ensure women’s representation, which can help mitigate some of the cultural and systemic barriers that persist. As strategic and institutional empowerment initiatives take root, they pave the way for a transformed political environment where women’s contributions are recognized and valued, fostering a new era of inclusivity and equality in Somaliland’s political arena. The interplay of educational empowerment, supportive networks, and strategic empowerment creates a robust foundation for fostering significant advancements in women’s roles within the political landscape of Somaliland.

Discussion

This section of the discussion examines the intricate dynamics between the exclusion and empowerment of women in Somaliland’s political landscape, as evidenced by the study’s findings. By focusing on the
primary research questions, which aim to identify the barriers to and facilitators of women’s participation in parliamentary elections, this section seeks to analyze these findings within established theoretical frameworks, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of the socio-political forces at play. The exclusion of women from politics in Somaliland occurs in various forms, including cultural, structural, and psychological barriers, each of which contributes uniquely to the marginalization of women in the political sphere. These barriers not only prevent women from entering politics but also impede their persistence and success within it. By contrasting these themes of exclusion with those of empowerment—such as educational, supportive networks, and strategic empowerment—this discussion highlights the transformative potential of targeted interventions and strategic actions that can enhance the status of women in politics. To deepen our understanding of these barriers and facilitators, this section employs theoretical perspectives from Strain Theory, Social Identity Theory, Human Capital Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Resource Mobilization Theory. This theoretical grounding helps to elucidate why certain barriers are particularly formidable and how empowerment strategies can effectively counteract these challenges.

The theme of cultural exclusion brings to light the entrenched societal norms and elder-led political gatekeeping that uniquely hinder women’s active involvement in Somaliland’s political sphere. The study aimed to uncover the primary impediments that restrict women’s participation in Somaliland’s parliamentary elections, and cultural exclusion emerged as a crucial factor. The findings demonstrate that traditional elders’ influence and societal norms act as gatekeepers, explicitly excluding women from the political discourse and implicitly shaping public perceptions about the suitability of women for leadership roles. These findings align with Merton’s Strain Theory, which posits that societal structures can create pressures that prevent individuals from achieving societal goals, in this case, political participation. The cultural barriers identified reflect a strain between the cultural expectations of women’s roles and the actual opportunities available to them, leading to reduced political engagement among women.

Reflecting on these findings, it becomes evident that tackling these deep-seated cultural norms requires a multi-pronged approach that not only challenges these traditional beliefs but also actively promotes new narratives about women’s capabilities in leadership. The persistence of such exclusion underscores the need for continuous and targeted cultural sensitization efforts to shift public perception and dismantle the patriarchal structures that govern political participation. While cultural exclusion forms a significant barrier to women’s political participation, structural exclusion further compounds these challenges, creating a complex layer of obstacles that women must navigate to access political platforms.

Structural exclusion presents a formidable obstacle to women’s political participation in Somaliland, manifested through financial constraints and entrenched political gatekeeping that systematically marginalize female candidates. It became clear that financial barriers and political gatekeeping are pervasive, significantly limiting women’s abilities to campaign effectively and access political networks. These structural barriers not only prevent women from running for office but also from sustaining viable campaigns due to the high costs associated and the male-dominated political structures that favor men. These structural barriers align with the concepts discussed in which emphasize how social structures and institutions perpetuate inequalities. Such theories argue that structures are designed in a way that maintains the status quo and prevents marginalized groups from achieving equality. In Somaliland, the political and financial structures are skewed to disadvantage women, reflecting a systemic resistance to gender equality in political representation.

Upon reflecting on these findings, structural reforms are necessary to dismantle these barriers. This would involve policy changes to ensure fair access to campaign resources and reforms to political party structures to ensure that women have equitable opportunities to participate. Addressing these structural issues is crucial for creating a level playing field where women can compete fairly with men. Beyond the overt barriers posed by cultural and structural exclusions, psychological exclusion also plays a critical role in shaping the political landscape for women in Somaliland, affecting their self-perception and societal perception of their leadership capabilities.
Psychological exclusion has a profound impact on the self-confidence and political aspirations of women in Somaliland, creating an environment where societal discouragement and the absence of female role models contribute to a cycle of diminished engagement. The findings suggest that societal discouragement and the lack of female role models not only diminish women’s self-esteem but also perpetuate community-held beliefs that politics is not a suitable or feasible arena for women. This psychological exclusion is manifested through pervasive negative stereotypes and a general lack of encouragement from both men and women within the community. This theme aligns with the principles of “Social Identity Theory,” which posits that individuals’ understanding of their own and others’ identities can significantly influence their behavior and self-esteem. In the context of Somaliland, the limited representation of women in politics contributes to a social identity that views political engagement as predominantly male, discouraging women from aspiring to or assuming political roles.

In light of these psychological barriers, it is imperative to implement initiatives that enhance women’s self-efficacy and public perception of female leaders. Such initiatives could include leadership training for women, public campaigns celebrating female political successes, and educational programs in schools that promote gender equality in leadership. Addressing the interconnected themes of cultural, structural, and psychological exclusion is crucial, but understanding the empowerment strategies through educational, supportive, and strategic measures is equally critical to fostering an environment that supports women’s political participation.

Enhancing educational opportunities for women is crucial for promoting their political participation in Somaliland. By equipping women with the necessary knowledge and skills, they can challenge traditional societal norms and effectively engage in the political arena. Educated women possess greater confidence and credibility, which enables them to participate in political discourse and activities. This aligns with the principles of Human Capital Theory, which asserts that investing in education increases an individual’s economic and societal contributions.

In Somaliland’s political landscape, educated women are better positioned to articulate their platforms, comprehend the complexities of governance, and advocate for policies that promote gender equality. Therefore, it is essential to provide women with increased access to educational opportunities, such as scholarships, adult education programs, and targeted campaigns that emphasize the importance of women’s political participation for societal advancement.

While educational empowerment is a critical factor in elevating women’s roles in politics, the development of supportive networks is necessary to ensure sustained political engagement and success. These networks can offer mentorship, resources, and opportunities for collaboration, empowering women to overcome barriers and achieve their political goals. Ultimately, the combination of educational empowerment and supportive networks is critical for fostering greater political participation and representation of women in Somaliland.

Supportive networks, which encompass both intra-gender solidarity and alliances across genders, are essential in nurturing the political careers of women in Somaliland. These networks offer emotional and strategic support and play a pivotal role in nurturing the political careers of women in Somaliland. This study aimed to assess the impact of communal and interpersonal support on women’s political engagement. The findings reveal that while support from male allies and other women is not universally strong, where it exists, it significantly enhances the confidence and visibility of female candidates, helping them navigate the political landscape more effectively. The importance of supportive networks can be contextualized within Social Capital Theory, which emphasizes the value of networks as resources that individuals can draw upon for support and to gain access to new opportunities. In the challenging political environment of Somaliland, these networks are crucial for women, providing not just emotional backing but also practical help in campaigning and navigating political processes.

The evidence suggests a need for more structured efforts to build and strengthen these networks. Initiatives could include mentorship programs linking aspiring female politicians with experienced leaders, both within Somaliland and internationally, and creating formal networks that can offer regular
training, resources, and advocacy support. As supportive networks fortify women’s resolve and capability to engage in politics, strategic empowerment through tailored campaign strategies and advocacy for inclusive policies becomes crucial in transforming these individual capabilities into tangible electoral success.

Strategic empowerment, which incorporates deliberate campaign strategies and advocacy for institutional reforms, provides women in Somaliland with the necessary tools and platforms to challenge existing barriers and establish themselves as potent political leaders. It was discovered that women who implemented well-planned campaign strategies or were part of movements advocating for policy reforms were more successful in navigating the political landscape. These strategies not only enhanced their visibility but also positioned them as competent leaders capable of contributing to political discourse. This aspect of empowerment aligns with Resource Mobilization Theory, which emphasizes the importance of resources in the success of social movements, including political campaigns. In Somaliland, strategic empowerment serves as a critical resource, allowing women to mobilize support, manage campaigns effectively, and advocate for reforms that level the playing field.

Reflecting on the significance of strategic empowerment, it is evident that training in campaign management, public speaking, and policy advocacy is crucial for women. Moreover, institutional support for these endeavors—from both local and international organizations—can significantly bolster women’s efforts to gain and exercise political power. The interplay of education empowerment, supportive networks, and strategic empowerment creates a robust foundation for fostering substantial advancements in women’s roles within the political landscape of Somaliland, suggesting a promising outlook for future electoral cycles.

**Conclusion**

In summarizing our thorough examination of women’s roles in Somaliland’s electoral politics, a multifaceted strategy is essential to dismantle the enduring obstacles that have historically excluded women from the political sphere. The entrenched cultural, structural, and psychological barriers that have been revealed through this research call for concerted efforts from both within and outside of Somaliland to establish an inclusive political climate where women can equally participate and assume leadership roles.

Educational empowerment, supportive networks, and strategic empowerment have emerged as vital pillars that, when reinforced, can significantly transform the landscape of women’s political participation in Somaliland. By addressing these empowering avenues, we can challenge the current situation and pave the way for sustainable change by equipping women with the necessary tools, resources, and support to navigate and eventually surmount the existing barriers.

To achieve this goal, it is crucial for policymakers, community leaders, and international partners to allocate resources to programs that enhance the political knowledge and leadership abilities of women, create robust networks of support among women, and advocate for and implement policy reforms that ensure women’s equal participation in all aspects of political life. Additionally, continuous dialogue should be encouraged to change cultural perceptions about women’s roles in society.

It is also important to foster an environment where young girls and women can see and believe in their potential to lead and make significant decisions. This requires not only the support and encouragement of families and communities but also a visible commitment from current political leaders to actively promote gender equality.

In summary, the path towards achieving gender equality in Somaliland’s political sphere is both difficult and full of potential. By displaying unwavering dedication and implementing strategic measures guided by the findings of this study, Somaliland can make significant strides towards establishing a political system that genuinely represents its diverse population. The participation of women in politics is not just an indicator of democratic progress but is also an essential prerequisite for the comprehensive and
sustainable development of the nation. Although the journey ahead is lengthy, each step taken towards gender parity brings us closer to a more just and equitable political future for our children.

References


