Understanding women’s representation and participation in local government planning: a 2000 - 2021 South African trend analysis

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ABSTRACT

The extent of women's representation and visibility in local government planning in South Africa has been significantly constrained. Over the years, the recurring phenomenon of insufficient participation and representation in local governance has become a prevalent issue within the country. The inclusion and participation of women in the decision-making process of local government should not be driven solely by the necessity to comply with legislative and policy frameworks and not by just a mere representation in terms of reflecting on the number of participants. Incorporating diverse individuals and groups is crucial in guaranteeing that progress within communities is accomplished acceptably. The act of prioritizing men's interests or political opportunism over women's interests in local government planning lacks justification. This study elucidates diverse factors that underlie the insufficient involvement and representation of women in local government planning. These variables encompass the prevalence of custom, culture, and tradition; socialisation, attitudes, and stereotypes; violence against women in politics; the media; finances and resources; structural deficiencies; patriarchy; and education. The research relied on existing scholarly works and documented accounts to investigate the causative elements and explicate their effect on the developmental condition. The article posits that addressing these factors requires a comprehensive approach that includes a multifaceted approach and a dosage of sustained efforts to ensure that there is gender balance and fair representation of women in local government planning. The study contributes to a better understanding of the participation and representation of women in the context of local government planning. It provides insights into strategies for creating more inclusive opportunities for women to express their views and exercise influence in local decision-making procedures.

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Introduction

The call for gender parity in political decision-making gained significant momentum following the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, as well as the 2000 UN Millennium Development Goals, which emphasized the importance of gender equality in politics, particularly in developing nations (Tagoe and Abakah, 2015). Women's participation in local political discourse, with the potential to impact public needs and interests on a global scale, has become increasingly vital (ESCAP, 2019). The inclusion of women in localized decision-making frameworks has proven effective in promoting equitable societies and comprehensive governance, crucial for enhancing living standards, improving community amenities, and fostering inclusive participation in decision-making bodies. Empowering women in local government planning is a global imperative (Barongo and Mulegi, 2023). Regrettably, South Africa continues to grapple with the under-representation of women in its political decision-making structures and processes (Vyas-Doorgapersad, and Shava, 2022). Makalela, Masenya, and Mokoele (2021) argue that gender inequality and the marginalization of women persist as significant obstacles to effective local government planning. Women contend with systematic patriarchal influences at both governmental and household levels, compounded by high illiteracy rates, poverty, low self-assertiveness, and negative perceptions of women's political participation. Notably, the lack of political will cannot be overlooked as a key factor that hampers women's participation in South African politics (Vyas-Doorgapersad, and Shava, 2022). It is worth noting

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the relative neglect of local government in the realm of political decision-making, which contrasts with the notion that women might have better prospects of assuming decision-making roles at the local level than at the central level (Tagoe and Abakah, 2015). Gendered political dynamics, particularly the marginalization of women, hinder South Africa's democratic governance paradigm, both at the national and municipal levels (Tagoe and Abakah, 2015).

Gender equality and good governance are two of the most pervasive themes in development debates in recent times (African Barometer, 2021). Achieving gender equality in South Africa remains a significant challenge, primarily due to deeply ingrained patriarchal beliefs that have historically discouraged women's active involvement in the country's political, social, and economic spheres (Shava, 2021; Vyas-Dooragopersad, and Shava, 2022). The pervasive underrepresentation of women in political arenas hampers their capacity to influence decision-making processes. The entrenched social patriarchies and hierarchies that prevail in many African societies persist in marginalizing women, leaving them on the periphery of the planning landscape within local government (Mokoele, 2017). McEwan (2003) underscores the importance of incorporating gender equality, citizenship, and community participation into South Africa's local government transformations to effectively foster local socio-economic development. Furthermore, Mokoele (2017) asserts that urgent policy revisions are necessary within South Africa's local government planning systems to address gender inequality and encourage inclusive participation in planning and good governance. Women holding leadership positions in South African local governments encounter misogynistic influences, which inhibit their creative potential and overall efficiency due to pervasive distrust and misperceptions regarding their capabilities (Ahiante and Ndaguba, 2023). The research conducted by Maharaj and Maharaj (2004) highlights the underrepresentation of women in post-apartheid South African local government, shedding light on the discrimination they face and emphasizing the need for strategic measures in the decision-making process. Furthermore, the evidence underscores that most individuals living in poverty are women, which continues to pose a significant challenge in effecting change at the local level and driving profound social transformation (The Presidency, 2014).

Nonetheless, gender disparity continues to pervade the architectural design of local government planning, particularly within local government organizations (Kilgour, 2012; Mokoele, 2017). According to Statistics South Africa (2016), women in South Africa represent 38%, 33%, and 39% of municipal mayors, managers, and councilors, respectively. The International Electoral Commission (2021) reports that only 27.11% of 4,316 wards are led by women, with men occupying the majority at 72.89%. This stark contrast underscores the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions within the municipal landscape (Mokoele, 2017). While some may argue that South Africa has made strides in achieving gender equity within legal and policy frameworks, these gains do not adequately address the persistent issue of gender marginalization in local government. It is against this background that the paper hopes to study elucidate diverse factors that underlie the insufficient involvement and representation of women in local government planning.

Research Methodology

The study extensively drew upon extant literature, leveraging diverse research databases including Google, Google Scholar, Scopus, AOSIS, ProQuest, and university repositories for a comprehensive review. Employing a Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) approach, the paper scrutinized existing literature to discern factors influencing women's representation and participation in South African local government planning. With a specific focus on the planning of basic community services, the research addressed the pronounced gender gap in South African municipal councils, indicative of systemic gender inequality challenges. Noteworthy barriers confronting women in local government encompassed custom, culture, and tradition; socialization, attitudes, and stereotypes; violence against women in politics; media dynamics; financial constraints and resource allocation; structural deficiencies; patriarchal influences; and educational hindrances. This article systematically explored these barriers, shedding light on their intricate interplay in shaping women's engagement in South African local government planning.

Theoretical Underpinnings

This paper adopts a Liberal Feminist Theory (LFT) framework to analyze the participation of women political leaders in local decision-making bodies. Liberal Feminist Theory is a social, political, and intellectual movement dedicated to eliminating gender-based discrimination and advancing gender equality. It emphasizes the importance of understanding gender as a social construct and explores its intersection with other forms of oppression, such as race, class, and sexuality (Vyas-Dooragopersad, and Shava, 2022). The application of this theory is especially valuable as it allows for an examination of women's involvement in local government structures as a means of achieving gender equality in local politics (Meena, 2015; Meena, Rusimbi, and Israel, 2017). One of the significant advantages of adopting LFT is its recognition of the government's role in ensuring equal political participation for all individuals, particularly in local politics, and in addressing the barriers that hinder women's participation (Makalanga, et al. 2022). This aligns with the United Nations' emphasis on the theory's potential to raise awareness among public and private entities regarding how women exercise leadership in politics, to dismantle systems of exclusion and oppression that affect women in various spheres of life (Kishwar, 1986).

However, the utilization of LFT in this context falls short of offering insights into how women political leaders in local government structures can leverage the available opportunities to engage in decision-making processes. This aspect of women's participation in local decision-making organs has not been thoroughly addressed (Makalanga, et al. 2022). Enhancing women's participation in
decision-making at all levels represents a significant objective, increasing the likelihood of women’s needs and preferences taking a central role in municipal politics. The mobilization around gender issues within local government in the late 1990s initially prompted some attention to incorporate gender considerations into the guidelines designed to support local government following the major reorganization in 2000 (Todes, Sithole, and Williamson, 2007). Feminist scholars widely acknowledge the pivotal role of women in the planning and implementation of development initiatives to address societal needs (Mokoele, 2017). Thus, feminist theory offers a crucial context for comprehending women's engagement and representation in local government planning. Beall (2005) also posits that decentralization strategies in local government can sometimes limit women's participation and hinder the policy's potential to address gender-related issues, despite being seen as beneficial for women. The next section discusses the roles of institutions, policies, and legislative frameworks on gender equality in South Africa thereafter are outlined.

The Roles of Institutions, Policies, and Legislative Frameworks on Gender Equality in South Africa

South Africa's commitment to advancing gender equality is evident through its endorsement of numerous international accords and conventions that promote gender parity. This commitment is deeply rooted in the country's constitution, which not only guarantees gender equality but also prohibits gender-based discrimination. Of note is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (United Nations General Assembly, 1979). To further this cause, South Africa has implemented a range of proactive policies and programs across various sectors, including education, employment, politics, and healthcare. The National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality holds significant relevance as it delineates the strategy for achieving gender parity throughout society (Office on the Status of Women, 2000). In 1997, the South African Parliament passed legislation establishing the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE), designated as one of the Chapter 9 institutions outlined in the Constitution. The CGE was tasked with promoting respect for, protection of, development, and attainment of gender equality, as specified in the Commission on Gender Equality Act of 1996 (Kgobe and Mamokhere, 2021).

The CGE's mandate includes monitoring, evaluation, research, investigation of complaints, and conducting public awareness and education on women's rights and gender equality (Commission for Gender Equality, 2017). Notably, it plays a crucial role in safeguarding gender equality and human dignity as outlined in section 187 (1-3) of the South African Constitution (Kgobe and Mamokhere, 2021). The CGE also offers advice and recommendations to parliamentary bodies and relevant committees tasked with reviewing gender parity legislation, in line with its constitutional mandate (Commission for Gender Equality, 2017). Kgobe and Mamokhere (2021) argue that the CGE’s role should extend beyond mere equity and strive to empower women without perpetuating a gender hierarchy. However, the 2014 National Gender Summit, titled 'Reflecting on 20 years of democracy in South Africa (1996 - 2016): Celebrating gains and strategizing on challenges to attaining gender equality,' raised concerns about the CGE's independence. Public perception pointed to a close alliance between CGE commissioners and the ruling party, exacerbated by the CGE's reluctance to take a stand on controversial issues and underutilize its powers. There was also a perceived bias towards collaborating with non-controversial partners in its project work (Commission for Gender Equality, 2017).

In addition to issues of independence, several reviews highlighted potential overlap in the mandates of some Chapter 9 institutions, such as the South African Human Rights Council (SAHRC) and the CGE (Commission for Gender Equality, 2017). The CGE's early years were marked by efforts to secure a budget to ensure its survival, and it only established an institutional structure for its work in the 1998/99 financial year (Commission for Gender Equality, 2017). The review of the National Gender Machinery revealed concerns about duplication of mandates, insufficient human, financial, and technical capacity, lack of cohesion and coordination, and weaknesses in gender mainstreaming and budgeting (Commission for Gender Equality, 2017). Specifically, issues concerning women's political participation and representation emerged as a significant concern, with under-representation of women in various spheres, including the private sector, and a perception of a hostile institutional culture towards women (Commission for Gender Equality, 2017).

The Republic of South Africa's 1996 Constitution serves as the fundamental law of the land and the cornerstone of democracy. The Bill of Rights within the constitution explicitly prohibits discrimination on various grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, color, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, or birth (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 1996; Vyasa-Doorgapersad, and Shava, 2022). Section 9 of Chapter 2 of the Constitution emphasizes equality and forbids discrimination based on race, gender, sex, and other factors, firmly establishing gender equality as a fundamental principle. The Constitution goes further to mention gender equality, affirmative action, personal freedom, security, and socioeconomic rights, underlining the importance of remedial action to achieve equality (RSA, 1996). The National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, approved by parliament in 2000, serves as a crucial tool for guiding government spheres in developing gender policies. This policy outlines the procedures that ensure women's rights and opportunities in government, family, and communities and advocates for gender mainstreaming to attain gender equality and empowerment (Office on the Status of Women, 2000; Vyasa-Doorgapersad, and Shava, 2022). However, it is important to note that despite these policies and frameworks, cases of gender abuse and discrimination persist within government departments (Oparinde and Matsha, 2021). The next section discusses the trends of women’s participation and representation and the impact on local government planning thereafter.

Trends of Women’s Participation and Representation in South African Local Government Planning

The trends of women's participation and representation in South African local government planning reveal persistent challenges. Despite constitutional provisions encouraging community involvement in local government matters, public participation exercises
remain cosmetic and peripheral, lacking genuine attempts to solicit community input to inform policymaking (Hicks, 2011). The current system of ward committees, the primary driver of public participation at the municipal level, does not enable meaningful citizen deliberation of development and planning issues, let alone women’s full participation (Hicks, 2011). Additionally, despite the existence of a Gender Policy Framework for Local Government, gender remains a ‘side issue’ in local government, hindering women's equal representation and participation in the political arena (McEwan, 2003; Mokoele, 2017). The underrepresentation of women in planning within local government inhibits the effective addressing of gendered poverty and inequality (Mokoele, 2017). These trends underscore the need for interventions to enable meaningful engagement and representation of women in local government planning in South Africa.

The 5 December 2000 elections were therefore the founding elections for South Africa’s first truly democratic and fully representative municipal councils (IEC, 2000). These elections had the same historical significance for local government as did the 1994 elections for national and provincial governments. These were to be the first municipal elections under a new and, at first glance at least, complex local government system (IEC, 2000). The 2000 elections set a precedence for all local government elections held thus far from 2006, 2011, 2016, and 2021, to thoroughly understand women’s participation and representation trends in South African local government planning. The trends as per the outcomes and reports of the local government elections conducted from the first 2000 election to the recent 2021 election are depicted below (Figures 1 & 2). Firstly, the trends in women’s participation and representation in local government planning results are outlined from the national overview and are presented in percentages and years.

To ensure inclusiveness and equitable representation in governance, both genders must participate in local government elections. For a number of reasons, including fostering diversity, improving decision-making processes, and attending to the needs and concerns of every community member, achieving gender equality in local government is essential.

![Figure 1](image)

**Figure 1:** Participation (Candidature) by Gender in Local Government Elections (2000 - 2016); Source: (IEC, 2000; 2006; 2011; Netswara, 2012; IEC, 2016); Please note: 2021 Data is not available at the IEC

In 2000, women constituted 28.46% of the contestants, while men were at 71.54%. In 2006, the percentage of female participants increased to 35%, with men at 65%. In 2011, although there was an increase in the number of women involved, the imbalanced trend dominated by men continued with women at 37% and men at 63% (Figure 1). In 2016, the participation of women further increased to 39%, while men decreased slightly to 61%. evidently, there was a consistent upward trend in the percentage of female participation over these years, suggesting a positive shift towards increased gender diversity in local government elections. From 2000 to 2006, there was an increase of 6 percentage points in female participation. From 2006 to 2011, the increase was 2 percentage points. From 2011 to 2016, there was a further increase of 2 percentage points. The data indicates a gradual but steady improvement in female participation rates (Figure 1). That is, between 2001 and 2016, there is a noticeable increase of 10 percentage points in participation of women in local government elections across South Africa. While the overall trend is towards increased female participation, the percentage of male participants has generally decreased over the same years. The increasing trend in female participation suggests that efforts to encourage women to participate in local government elections may be having a positive impact. Ongoing initiatives and policies supporting gender diversity may be contributing to the observed changes however sustained efforts are required to address the persistent under-representation of women in local government planning. Both genders must fairly participate in local government elections to create more represented, inclusive, and functional political systems. To achieve equality between men and women and consider the various requirements of communities when making decisions locally, efforts must be made to encourage and support women’s involvement in politics.
In local government, the gender composition of a municipal council presented in percentage for representation of men and women who hold seats or other posts in the council must be fairly constituted. Achieving a balanced composition is necessary for efficient governance that appropriately considers the various demands and viewpoints of the community.

![Figure 2: Composition of Municipal Council by Gender in Local Government (2000 - 2021); Source: (IEC,2000; 2006; 2011; 2016; 2021)](image)

There was a noticeable increase in female participation in municipal council from 2000 to 2006, reaching its peak at 41%. However, the percentage of women on municipal councils declined slightly in 2011 and remained steady in 2016. In 2021, there was a significant decrease in female participation in council posts to 27% (Figure 2). Whereas the percentage of men who participated in municipal councils has generally followed an inverse trend to women, with a decrease from 2000 to 2006, an increase in 2011, and stability in 2016. In 2021, there was a further increase in male participation at 73% from 59% in 2016. The gender composition in municipal councils has varied over the years. In 2000, there was a significant gender gap in favor of men with 72% being men and 28% women. The gender balance shifted in 2006, with a more even distribution. However, by 2021, there was a return to a significant gender gap, with 73% men and 27% women (Figure 2). The decrease in female participation in 2021 may indicate a need for further examination of factors influencing women's involvement in municipal council posts. It is imperative to achieve gender equality in the composition of municipal councils in order to foster more responsive, efficient, and inclusive local governance. Building stronger, more representative communities requires addressing gaps and promoting equitable opportunities for men and women in local government.

Women's involvement in local government planning has a significant and varied impact. Various benefits can be realized when women participate actively in local planning and decision-making processes. The participation of women guarantees diverse perspectives in local government planning because of their unique perspectives, experiences, and objectives (Fuo, 2015; Venugopalan Bastian and Viswanathan, 2021). Their involvement ensures that more issues are considered when developing policies and initiatives, particularly those that impact women and underprivileged communities. Additionally, the involvement of women in local government planning results in more transparent and inclusive governance (Marianata, 2019; Venugopalan et al., 2021). They frequently give social welfare, healthcare, education, childcare, and community well-being priority, which produces more all-encompassing and people-centered policies (Marianata, 2019). That is their participation in planning guarantees that programs for urban and rural development take gender-specific requirements into account. Safe public areas, healthcare, education, employment prospects, and combating gender-based violence are all considered. According to research, diverse groups are more likely to make wise decisions (Fuo, 2015; Marianata, 2019; Venugopalan et al., 2021). Women's varied perspectives are brought to local government planning, which produces more creative solutions and improved results for the community as a whole. Women in local government act as ambassadors and role models for other girls and women in the community because they feel more engaged and empowered when they are present, which promotes increased civic involvement (Fuo, 2015). Noticeably, women's involvement in planning has a favorable effect on both social and economic development (Duflo, 2012). Their participation in decisions on jobs, infrastructure, and resource distribution can result in more equitable development and higher living standards for all residents of the community. Women's viewpoints frequently highlight challenges that have an immediate effect on communities and families leading to the development of policies that put social services, healthcare, education, and environmental sustainability first, improving society as a whole (Fuo, 2015; Marianata, 2019; Venugopalan et al., 2021). Generally, communities that have more women involved in local government planning are frequently more resilient and sustainable. Their focus on community cohesiveness, environmental preservation, and socioeconomic issues helps to ensure that long-term planning takes the needs of future generations into account.

To realise the impact of women's participation in local government planning, South Africa's commitment to achieving 50% women's representation in decision-making positions by 2015 is imperative to address issues of poor representation and inadequate policies (Hicks, and Buccus, 2012). The local government’s Municipal Structural Act no.117 of 1998 specifies the requirement for parties to ensure that 50% of candidates on party lists are women, with an even distribution of women and men candidates (RSA, 1998). Gender mainstreaming remains essential for enhancing women's empowerment and achieving gender equality in South Africa, with a focus on their involvement in decision-making processes (Ismail and Arshad, 2013; Vyasa-Doorgpersad and Shava, 2022). It is essential to eliminate discrimination and create an environment where women are encouraged to participate in political offices without prejudice or bias (Nsumalo and Fagbayibo, 2020). South Africa's aspiration to achieve 50% women's representation in decision-
making positions by the year 2015 has encountered significant challenges stemming from inadequate policies and a lack of effective representation (Hicks and Buccus, 2012). To address this, the Municipal Structural Act of 1998 in South Africa explicitly mandates that, in the case of councilors elected through proportional representation from party lists, every political party is obliged to take measures to ensure that at least 50% of the candidates on their party list are women (RSA, 1998). Additionally, these parties are required to ensure an equitable distribution of women and men candidates throughout the list (Local Government Act, Schedule 1, Section 11 (3); Schedule 2, Sections 5 (3) and 17 (5)). The concept of gender mainstreaming emerges as pivotal in the quest to empower women and attain gender equality in South Africa. Gender mainstreaming hinges on the active participation of women in decision-making processes (Ismail and Arshad, 2013; Vyas-Doorgapersad and Shava, 2022). By prioritizing women's involvement in these processes, South Africa can make strides toward realizing its commitment to gender parity in leadership positions. Therefore, the next section focuses barriers to women’s participation in local government planning.

**Barriers to Women’s Participation in Local Government Planning**

Women's participation in South African local governments faces substantial impediments when it comes to decision-making, owing to entrenched organizational structures, patriarchal norms, and the inadequate implementation of gender mainstreaming policies (Joseph, 2022). Ahante and Ndaguba (2022) identify several barriers that hinder women's active involvement in local governance. These barriers encompass issues such as skepticism regarding women's capabilities and leadership styles, limitations in decision-making flexibility and consultation, conflicts related to values and ethos, demographics, social class distinctions, and political considerations within the South African local government system. In South African politics, women's representation remains disproportionately low, primarily due to a complex interplay of social, economic, and political factors (Vyas-Doorgapersad and Shava, 2022). According to Majola (2022), municipal councils lack proactive strategies to empower women councilors, fail to provide training on gender-related issues and neglect the grooming of sufficient female candidates for electoral contests. An essential step toward encouraging women's participation in South African political affairs lies in dismantling deeply ingrained patriarchy and masculine behaviors (Vyas-Doorgapersad and Shava, 2022).

Evident in South Africa, as in many other places, politics remains predominantly male-dominated, with women often relegated to positions of lesser influence (Malatji, 2017). The barriers women encounter are multifaceted, including sexism, harassment, violence, misogyny, and discrimination. These structural obstacles are further perpetuated by discriminatory policies, laws, and institutional practices, creating formidable barriers for women aspiring to hold political office (Vyas-Doorgapersad and Shava, 2022). One notable concern is the selective attention given to gender transformation and equality during certain occasions, such as Women’s Day celebrations and the 16 days of activism. It is essential to recognize that addressing gender inequality in South Africa is of paramount importance, as women continue to grapple with discrimination across various sectors of society, mirroring the global struggle faced by women in many parts of the world (Commission for Gender Equality, 2017). In a historical context, traditional norms have often excluded women from participating in village meetings unless specifically invited to provide evidence during dispute resolutions. Traditional leadership roles have traditionally been viewed as exclusively for men, although some exceptions exist (SADC, SARDC, 2022).

Scholars such as Myeni, (2014) and Vyas-Doorgapersad and Shava, (2022) and Research institutes such as African Barometer (2021), deem the following as systemic barriers to women’s political participation and include; Custom, Culture, and tradition; Socialisation, attitudes, stereotypes; Violence Against Women in Politics; The Media; Finances and Resources; Structural Deficiencies; Patriarchy; and Education. The abovementioned barriers are discussed below in greater details:

**Custom, Culture, and Tradition**

Myeni (2014), argues that cultural and traditional practices continue to infringe on the rights of women, and gendered power relations at all levels and in all spheres of life pose serious impediments to the advancement of women. Msweula (2010), argues that cultural practices in South Africa contribute to and exacerbate women’s subordination and inequality. Furthermore, these cultural norms are perpetuated and sustained by the powerful institutions of the family, traditional authorities, and religion, and have significant impacts on gendered-related issues. Myeni (2014:72), avers that in South Africa, the major forms of stereotype include “(1) That women’s primary responsibility is to take care of the family and children, and it is only a secondary obligation to get involved in political and social institutions, (2) That the public domain is mainly for men, while the private household domain is for women, (3) That women lack experience, and thus are not capable of assuming leadership positions, and (4) That women’s involvement in the public sphere should be an extension of their roles in the family.” Prokopenko (2022), adages that expanding women's representation in politics is crucial, but addressing gender biases and fostering a political culture free of discrimination are crucial for further progress.

**Socialisation, Attitudes, and Stereotypes**

Socialization, attitudes, and stereotypes are some of the cultural factors that hinder women's participation in politics in SA, as mentioned above on customs, culture, and tradition. Gender stereotypes and social norms and practices often limit women's involvement in political and social institutions (Myeni, 2014). For example, some stereotypes include the belief that women lack experience and are not capable of assuming leadership positions, or that women's involvement in the public sphere should be an extension of their roles in the family (Myeni, 2014). These attitudes and beliefs can discourage women from pursuing political careers.
or seeking leadership positions. Vyas-Doorgapersad (2014a), urges the South African local government to address stereotyping, discrimination, and career path opportunities to effectively enhance women’s representation and participation in local government.

Violence Against Women in Politics

Violence against women in South Africa, including in politics and local government, remains a significant issue despite legislative efforts and government action. Gender-based violence (GBV) is deeply ingrained in South African society, affecting women in various spheres, including homes, workplaces, and political institutions (Mogale, Burns and Richter, 2012). A study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the African Parliamentary Union (APU) revealed that sexism, harassment, and violence against women are widespread in African parlaments, with male parliamentary colleagues being the primary perpetrators of violence affecting women who work in parliaments in Africa (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). This underscores the need for concerted efforts to create safe spaces for women in politics and local government in South Africa. To this end, violence against women in politics in local government in South Africa is a multifaceted issue deeply rooted in societal norms and cultural attitudes. While the government has taken steps to address this problem, sustained efforts are needed to create safe and inclusive spaces for women in politics and local government.

The Media

Women, especially those from underrepresented groups, often have limited access to networks, information sources, and role models necessary for pursuing political office at both national and local levels. This lack of access to knowledge and information further hinders women's participation in local government planning (Maguire, 2018). However, imbalances in media coverage, underrepresentation of women politicians, and preoccupation with women as victims or celebrities can hinder women's political participation (European Parliament, 2013).

Finances and Resources

The participation of poor or marginalized women in development planning and local governance in South Africa faces several barriers, including financial and resource-related challenges (Ilesanmi, 2018). Many African women lack the economic power necessary to fully engage in leadership and decision-making roles (Ilesanmi, 2018). This lack of financial resources hinders their ability to participate effectively in politics and governance. Additionally, the gender pay gap, part-time employment due to caring responsibilities, and employment in lower-paid sectors collectively contribute to women's limited financial resources needed to stand as candidates in central and local government elections (Maguire, 2018). Addressing these financial barriers is crucial to enabling women to participate more effectively in local governance and decision-making processes in South Africa.

Structural Deficiencies

Structural deficiencies within the context of gender quotas encompass a spectrum of political and structural constraints, as elucidated by Myeni (2014). These constraints manifest in the incorporation and execution of quotas designated for women's representation, thereby placing women representatives at a disadvantage. The efficacy of gender quotas, despite their existence, hinges critically on the proper implementation thereof. Structural deficiencies extend beyond mere procedural lapses in quota execution; they encompass a broader set of challenges, including resource inadequacies, disparate access to political networks, and constrained opportunities for women to actively engage in decision-making processes (Myeni, 2014).

Patriarchy

Patriarchy refers to the dominance of territorial and partisan interests, which remain a major impediment to greater participation by women in the political process (Myeni, 2014). South Africa's struggle for gender equality and cultural diversity is hampered by the stubborn persistence of patriarchy, despite laws and court judgments granting women equal rights within families, institutions, and in politics and in every domain and under customary law (Albertyn, 2009). Joseph (2022), counsels that women in South Africa remain underrepresented in local government decision-making due to historical patriarchal norms and institutional values, which exclude and marginalise them. In South Africa, the persistent traditional patriarchal society, marked by class, race, and gender divisions, remains intact (Myeni, 2014). Social space and behavioral norms continue to rigidly adhere to gender distinctions. Within the family, a fundamental unit of social organization, male kin, particularly the father, holds decision-making powers and economic control, limiting women’s participation in politics and decision-making processes. This entrenched structure underscores the ongoing challenge of dismantling deeply rooted patriarchal norms that hinder women's engagement in the political sphere.

Education

Culture and education also play a role, as gender stereotypes and social norms and practices often limit women's involvement in political and social institutions, and many South African women lack education and information on the political process (Myeni, 2014). In South Africa, a significant number of women face challenges such as illiteracy and a lack of political process awareness, hindering their ability to mobilize for policies aligned with their interests (Myeni, 2014). Moreover, disillusionment stemming from unmet promises and corruption in neo-liberal policies has led to a decline in women's interest and participation in political activities. This underscores a critical intersection of socio-economic barriers and political disengagement among South African women.
Conclusion

The paper has explored the systemic barriers to women's political participation in South Africa requires a multifaceted approach. The paper drew attention to the notable gaps in women's visibility and representation in South African local government planning. It highlights how the persistent problem of women's underrepresentation in local administration has grown more widespread over time. Women's participation in decision-making shouldn't be limited to following legal and regulatory requirements or concentrating just on their numerical representation. Rather, it emphasizes how crucial it is to consider a variety of perspectives to successfully ensure community development. The paper identifies several causes for women's underrepresentation and lack of participation in local government planning. Cultural norms, societal attitudes and prejudices, media impact, violence against women in politics, financial restrictions, structural flaws, patriarchal institutions, and educational gaps are some of these causes. According to the paper, tackling these concerns calls for a thorough strategy that involves consistent work. To guarantee gender equity and equitable representation of women in local government planning, it highlights the necessity of a comprehensive approach. By doing this, it hopes to advance knowledge of women's representation and participation in local government. In conclusion, the wide gender gap in local government planning can have significant impacts on the socio-economic development of the country. Addressing this gender imbalance requires a multifaceted approach and a dosage of sustained efforts to ensure that there is gender balance and fair representation of women in local government planning. The following recommendations are further suggested in this paper:

i. Establish a robust institutional framework for gender responsiveness, which will incorporate a thorough Gender Management System.
ii. Deliver targeted training programmes for municipal stakeholders, emphasizing gender mainstreaming proficiency, adherence to the local government Gender Policy Framework, and the formulation of gender-disaggregated objectives alongside comprehensive monitoring, evaluation, and feedback strategies.
iii. Scrutinize and refine prevailing constitutional, political, legislative, and regulatory frameworks, including electoral systems, to eliminate provisions that impede equitable women's involvement in decision-making processes.
iv. Foster women's activism and a movement led by young, radical, African intersectional feminists.
v. Allocate financial support and resources strategically to facilitate women's effective participation in the spheres of politics and governance.

These interventions, among others, are crucial to enabling meaningful engagement and representation of women in local government planning and decision-making processes in South Africa.

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References


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