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WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: A CASE STUDY OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN CHIANG MAI

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Abstract

Women's political participation is essential for fostering inclusive policies, fortifying democratic governance, and advancing gender equality. Despite global progress, women's representation across all administrative levels in Thailand remains disproportionately low, particularly within Chiang Mai's local governance. This study examines the main barriers to women's political engagement in Chiang Mai's local administration and offers strategic recommendations to increase their participation. Using a qualitative research design, the study gathered data through semi-structured interviews to elicit comprehensive, in-depth insights. The analysis indicates that evolving social expectations, supportive legal frameworks, and initiatives like the Thai Women's Empowerment Fund positively facilitate women's involvement. Conversely, deeply entrenched Thai and Lanna patriarchal norms, coupled with pervasive systemic barriers, persistently obstruct women's advancement in local governance. To dismantle these constraints, the study advocates a paradigm shift away from traditional gender norms and the implementation of rigorous gender quota policies to increase women's political representation across all governmental tiers substantially.

Keywords: Political Participation, Local Governance, Gender Equality, Societal Norms, Gender Quotas

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Introduction

Women's political participation is crucial in shaping inclusive policies, strengthening democratic governance, and enhancing gender equality. Nonetheless, women worldwide face barriers to political participation and remain underrepresented in all forms of government. According to UN Women (2025), the percentage of women heading ministries fell from 23.3% in 2024 to 22.9% in 2025, and women's representation in national parliaments globally remains below 27.2%. Only six countries, Rwanda, Cuba, Nicaragua, Andorra, Mexico, and the United Arab Emirates, have reached 50% women's representation in national parliaments. In ASEAN countries, women hold only 23% of seats in national parliaments, below the global average (United Nations Development Program, 2025). The highest representation of women in Southeast Asia's national parliaments was only 35.4% in Timor-Leste, followed by Vietnam (31.4%), Singapore (29.6%), the Philippines (28%), Laos (22%), and Indonesia (21.9%), respectively. In contrast, Thailand's women's representation stood at only 19.6%, placing Thailand 7th in Southeast Asia and about 10% behind neighboring countries such as Vietnam and Singapore (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2025a), and ranking 128th out of 189 nations worldwide (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2025b).

Although Thailand granted women's political rights in 1932, the 1982 legislative adjustments allowed women to hold the positions of head village and sub-district chief, enabling them to administer and participate fully at every level of government (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives, 2013). The current 2017 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand clarifies that all citizens, regardless of gender, are entitled to participate freely in politics (Sricharoenwong, 2021). Despite these legal frameworks, women's participation in Thai politics remains significantly limited; however, gender representation in politics should ideally reflect a 50/50 balance (Rueankham, 2024).

Internationally, Thailand formally promotes gender equality and women's rights through its ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1985. It also endorsed the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) in 1995 to ensure equality between men and women (UN Women, n.d.a). Thailand also officially reaffirmed its dedication to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Kongsri, 2017). Specifically, SDG 5 focuses on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, which aligns directly with this research within international relations and development frameworks (Shreeves, 2024), as it identifies the challenges and recommendations for women's participation in Chiang Mai's local governance. Strumskyte et al. (2022) stated that women in politics are essential to achieving the SDGs by 2030 because women's leadership in governance helps address gender-sensitive issues and advances climate goals and policies aligned with SDG targets, particularly goals 5, 8, 10, and 13.

In local administration, women's representation in Provincial Administrative Organizations (PAOs) remains extremely low, especially in chief executive positions. In 2012, women were elected as chief executives in only nine provinces (Rueankham, 2024). Women's representation increased from nine to twelve chief executives elected in 2020 (King Prajadhipok's Institute, 2020), and the 2025 election increased to five women, or seventeen in total, across 76 provinces (Office of the Election Commission of Thailand, 2025). Furthermore, Chiang Mai is one of the top five provinces, along with Bangkok, Nakhon Ratchasima, Ubon Ratchathani, and Khon Kaen, with the largest Thai national population from 2019 to 2024 (The Bureau of Registration Administration, 2025). According to the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, amended (No. 1), B.E. 2021, Section 83 states that the House of Representatives consists of 500 members: 400 from constituencies and 100 from political party lists. Electoral constituencies are based on each area's population (The House of Representatives, n.d.). Table 1 shows that the number of female MPs from Chiang Mai doubled in the general elections, from two women in 2019 to five women in 2023, accounting for 50% of Chiang Mai's total MPs. In comparison,

Bangkok saw only a slight increase, with one female MP in 2023. Nakhon Ratchasima and Khon Kaen have had two female MPs in both 2019 and 2023. Meanwhile, the number of female MPs in Ubon Ratchathani rose dramatically from two in 2019 to seven in 2023 (Office of the Election Commission of Thailand, 2019; 2023).

Table 1 Gender Representation among Constituency-Based MPs in Thailand's Five Most Populous Provinces (2019–2023)

The five provinces with the largest Thai national populations during 2019-2024	General Election 2019		General Election 2023	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Bangkok	9	21	10	23
Nakhon Ratchasima	2	12	2	14
Ubon Ratchathani	2	8	7	4
Khon Kaen	2	8	2	9
Chiang Mai	2	7	5	5

Table 1 demonstrates that among the five provinces in the recent 2023 general election, Chiang Mai was the only province to achieve gender balance in its MPs (Rueankham, 2023). However, at the PAO level, no woman has been elected chief executive of Chiang Mai's PAO in the last two elections, 2020 and 2025, as shown in Table 2 (King Prajadhipok's Institute, 2020; Office of the Election Commission of Thailand, 2025). Chiang Mai is chosen as a case study because it provides important insights into the obstacles and possibilities for women's political participation in Thailand by illustrating the dynamic traditional norms that restrict women at the local level and progressive gender balance at the national level.

Table 2 Gender Representation in PAO Chief Executive Elections across Thailand's Five Most Populous Provinces (2020–2025)

The five provinces with the largest Thai national populations	PAO Election 2020		PAO Election 2025	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Bangkok	-	✓	-	✓
Nakhon Ratchasima	✓	-	✓	-
Ubon Ratchathani	-	✓	-	✓
Khon Kaen	-	✓	-	✓
Chiang Mai	-	✓	-	✓

For all the reasons discussed above, this research examines the barriers to women's participation in politics and local government in Thailand, using Chiang Mai Province as a case study. It offers suggestions to improve women's involvement in local governance and politics. This research aims to (1) identify the challenges of women's participation in Chiang Mai's local governance, Thailand, and (2) propose recommendations to increase women's participation in Chiang Mai's local governance.

Literature Review

Gender Norms in Thailand

Deep-rooted gender norms significantly hinder women's political participation in Thailand. Seibel (2010) found that Thai gender norms placed women's responsibilities mainly on domestic work, such as being homemakers or mothers, rather than on political affairs. Komlongharn (2024) expressed that gender norms contribute to gender bias and discrimination, which persist in political spaces today. For example, the traditional Thai phrase 'Phu chai pen

chang thaw na, Phuying pen chang thaw lung' symbolizes the belief that men are natural leaders, while women are expected to follow (Mee-Udon & Donornbao, 2015). Raggatanyoo (2019) argued that gender norms no longer significantly restrict women in politics because women are legally granted the same political rights as men, allowing them to participate fully in political careers at all levels. Similarly, Encinas-Franco (2022) found that, in the Philippines, traditional norms constrain women's political involvement by suggesting that men are more suitable for holding political positions, while women are expected to be homemakers. Women in Thailand and the Philippines remain underrepresented in politics because of entrenched cultural and gender norms; however, both nations are working to advance gender balance across all levels of the administrative sector (Lagmay & Soler, 2024).

Gender Norms in Chiang Mai Province

Lanna's values are rooted in Chiang Mai province and have historically assigned distinct gender roles shaped by spiritual, familial, and socio-cultural traditions. Sae-Wang (2013) asserted that conventional beliefs about the ancestor spirits 'phi poo phi yai' are always associated with the female line. Lanna culture greatly emphasizes matrilineal features, and women dominated the Lanna social structure, but not in the political arena. Ratana (2024) found that men predominantly dominate politics, economics, and social culture in Lanna's values, while the role of women is often found to be subordinate in patriarchal society. Rueankham (2023) found that Lanna women are often perceived through a cultural lens that emphasizes gentle, graceful behavior, physical beauty, and traditional domestic roles such as housewives, shaped by Lanna's cultural norms. Susa (2022) argued that women played essential roles in the region's administration and Lanna's culture did not hinder women at all. For instance, noble women in Lanna during the Mangrai Dynasty (1839-2121 BE) played roles that reflected matrilineal kinship networks, enabling ruling-class women to exert significant influence in the political spheres of the Lanna Kingdom.

Key Barriers to Women's Political Participation in Thailand

Systemic barriers continue to limit women's participation in Thai politics. Sricharoenwong (2021) stated that current Thai law gives women equal rights to men, but it remains poorly enforced. For instance, the current 2017 Constitution mentions that all citizens are entitled to equal rights, duties, and political rights. The Constitution states that preparing political party lists must take gender equality into account. However, the term "take into account" is vague, and subordinate legislation, such as the Political Parties Act, contains no specific provision to reinforce this principle. Moreover, women lack strong alliances and political networks to support their engagement. More coordinated, integrated efforts across agencies are needed to increase the proportion of women in politics (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives, 2013). Samthong (2022) observed that women often encounter limited access and networks that exclude them, whereas professional men frequently attend such parties and golf tournaments. This can make women appear as outsiders, limiting their engagement and ability to build connections. Dolsook (2020) argued that government organizations have already recognized the importance of women's leadership in advancing gender equality and inclusive governance at all levels. For example, Thailand's local administration bodies are designed to promote citizen participation in governance, ensuring that everyone, regardless of gender, has an equal opportunity to contribute to decision-making.

Key Barriers to Women's Political Participation in Chiang Mai's Local Governance

Patriarchal values and a lack of family or networking support have challenged women's participation in Chiang Mai's local governance. The first barrier is the patriarchy of the Thai socio-cultural system that has remained in the community until now. Rodsap (2012) identified that patriarchal values originate from the family institution, where men are positioned as dominant figures over women. This patriarchal thought extends into religious and political institutions, shaping societal expectations of women who must take care of children at home

only. Sirilurt (2023) noted that inclusive policies and practices still face constraints from belief systems that perpetuate gender role separation in the political arena. Notably, women remain underrepresented in political positions and have not achieved significant representation at any level of government. Tarasi et al. (2021) argued that patriarchy no longer shapes women's political engagement in Chiang Mai, as women have gained equal access to education and can pursue political careers at all levels. The second barrier is a lack of family support. Kuawicharn et al. (2025) found that family and political network support influences women's decisions to participate in politics. Furthermore, the Secretariat of the House of Representatives (2013) reported that women in local areas often lack family support, which negatively affects their political participation. Women also face challenges in building strong networks and alliances that support political engagement. Dolsook (2020) observed that most women are expected to prioritize family matters, which limits the time and energy they can dedicate to work for public affairs compared to men. Nachemson (2023) argued that women in Chiang Mai today play a significant role in politics, reflecting a paradigm shift as a new generation enters Thai politics rather than relying on family support.

Research Methods

This research used a qualitative approach and semi-structured interviews to gather primary data. This interview method allows for pre-defined questions while also providing flexibility to explore topics in greater depth based on participants' responses. Additionally, secondary sources provided a comprehensive analysis of diverse perspectives on women's participation in Chiang Mai's local governance.

A purposive, non-probability sampling method was employed to select participants with extensive, diverse backgrounds in Chiang Mai's local governance and gender politics. To ensure a comprehensive and multi-faceted representation of perspectives, ten key informants were carefully categorized into five distinct cohorts. The first cohort comprised senior government officials with at least 15 years of administrative experience, providing insights into the bureaucratic mechanisms related to women's participation. The second and third cohorts included elected and non-elected political representatives, respectively, each possessing significant tenure in local governance or policy consultation, thereby reflecting the realities of political engagement. The fourth cohort consisted of academic experts in women's studies and gender equality, providing critical theoretical and socio-cultural context. Finally, the fifth cohort involved experienced NGO personnel dedicated to human rights and women's empowerment advocacy. This rigorous selection framework, encompassing diverse professional backgrounds and substantial field experience, ensured a robust and nuanced analysis of the structural and cultural dynamics influencing women's political participation in the region.

Table 3 Profiles of Key Informants

No	Position	Participants	Experiences	Organization
1	The Government Official	A	15 years	Chiang Mai Provincial Office
2	The Government Official	B	15 years	Chiang Mai's PAO
3	Member of Parliament	C	7 years	Thai Parliament
4	Member of Parliament	D	5 years	Thai Parliament
5	Member of the PAO Council	E	4 years	Chiang Mai's PAO
6	Member of the PAO Council	F	4 years	Chiang Mai's PAO

7	Non-elected Political Representative	G	20 years	-
8	Academic Person	H	7 years	Chiang Mai University
9	Academic Person	I	13 years	Chiang Mai University
10	NGO Personnel	J	5 years	A Women-led Human Rights Organization

Participants voluntarily consented to take part after being fully informed about the research purpose and procedures. To protect their privacy and confidentiality, the researcher used alphabetical labels, such as Participant A to J. The researcher conducted all interviews from June 11, 2025, to July 19, 2025, both in person and online. All data collected are securely stored and accessible to the researcher. Moreover, participants were assured that their information would be used only for academic purposes.

Research Results

Enablers of Women's Political Participation

The empirical findings indicate that evolving social expectations and supportive legal frameworks serve as critical enablers for women's political participation in Thailand. Reflecting a positive shift in societal attitudes, Thailand rose to 65th in the Global Gender Gap Report 2024 (Sumano, 2025), up from 75th in 2019 (Sivakriskul & Seip, 2020). This progress is evident in Chiang Mai, where the number of female Members of Parliament (MPs) surged from two in 2019 to five in 2023, achieving a gender-balanced representation at the national electoral level (Rueankham, 2023). Correspondingly, Participant F confirmed that local social attitudes have grown increasingly open-minded, acknowledging women's competence in authority and decision-making roles. These social shifts are also supported by strong legal guarantees: the 2017 Constitution unequivocally grants equal political rights and requires political parties to consider gender equality in candidate lists (Sricharoenwong, 2021). Consequently, Participants A, C, D, E, F, G, H, and I reported that formal legal frameworks generally allow all Thai nationals to participate equally and no longer impede political entry. This is reflected by the rise in female national parliamentary representation from 15.8% in 2020 to 19.6% in 2025 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2025b). This trajectory mirrors the successful evolution observed in New Zealand, where historical representation was minimal due to unsupportive frameworks and traditional views (Else, 2011). However, comprehensive legal reforms (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021)—such as the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 (New Zealand Bill of Rights Act, 1990)—and targeted public advocacy campaigns by the National Council of Women of New Zealand (Else, 1993) progressively dismantled these barriers. This ultimately resulted in three female prime ministers (Else, 2011), a national parliament comprising over 45% women (UN Women, 2025), and 39% women in local government (UN Women, n.d.b).

Beyond structural and legal shifts, the government-initiated Women's Empowerment Fund (WEF) actively facilitates political engagement by bolstering economic independence. Designed as a low-interest revolving financial mechanism, the WEF promotes career development, income generation, and leadership empowerment (Sirimat & Sinthao, 2023). For instance, the WEF enabled the Ban Huai Sai Women Group in Chiang Mai to elevate traditional hemp weaving into a four-star OTOP enterprise, significantly increasing income and expanding its membership (Thai Women Empowerment Funds, 2023). Participant A noted that as women collaborate to improve their economic conditions and address community issues, they naturally become more willing to engage in local politics. However, challenges remain in the WEF's implementation, including inadequate public outreach that limits awareness primarily to older demographics attending local meetings (Juntharapan, 2023) and a lack of specific focus on

increasing women's political participation (Yutthaworakool, 2024). Consequently, Participant G advocated for an enforceable legal framework to systematically integrate political capacity-building into the WEF, thereby amplifying women's representation in local governance.

Societal and Systemic Barriers

Despite notable progress, deeply rooted gender norms and formidable systemic barriers persistently obstruct women's advancement in Chiang Mai's local governance. Culturally, both traditional Thai and specific Lanna patriarchal norms continue to relegate women to subordinate spheres. While Lanna spiritual traditions, such as phi poo phi ya (ผีปอบ ผีย่า) ancestor worship, associate women with ritual leadership, they also restrict women's roles to household and family economy management, designating public affairs and political leadership as exclusively male domains (Kitsuntorn & Eiamrerai, 2023). Historically, Lanna culture did not allow women to study alongside men, expected gentle behavior, and prioritized family responsibilities (Intamool, 2012). Participants F and I agreed that these Lanna norms continue to restrict women's participation today. Participant I further elaborated that these entrenched beliefs dictate submissive behavior, often undermining women's confidence in independent decision-making due to fears of violating spiritual taboos and bringing misfortune to elders. Consequently, social expectations in Chiang Mai often confine women to subordinate roles, such as volunteerism or organizing housewife groups, rather than pursuing formal political office (Sakrajai, 2018). This persistent bias—reinforced by the broader Thai perception that men are naturally more suitable for leadership positions (Ratana, 2024)—requires female politicians to work significantly harder than their male counterparts to establish trust and demonstrate their capabilities, as noted by Participants E and F. This marginalization is starkly reflected in the political reality: parliament speakers remain predominantly male, and no woman has ever been elected chief executive of Chiang Mai's Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO) across the 2012, 2020, and 2025 elections (King Prajadhipok's Institute, 2020; Rueankham, 2024; Office of the Election Commission of Thailand, 2025).

Compounding these cultural impediments are severe systemic barriers, including structural exclusion from political networks and decision-making processes. Government agencies currently lack the integrated, coordinated efforts needed to effectively enhance women's political engagement (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives, 2013). Furthermore, political parties, connections, and community networks heavily influence women's decisions to participate in politics (Kuawicharn et al., 2025). Participants B and D noted that female candidates frequently lack crucial support from political networks and connections. Participant C added that while men fully participate in cultural events, women have fewer opportunities to interact visibly with local communities. Male politicians actively cultivate strong political networks through informal, exclusive gatherings—such as attending parties and golf tournaments—spaces where patriarchal norms prevail, and women are consequently marginalized (Samthong, 2022). This lack of access to informal networks is a primary systemic obstacle preventing women from fully participating in Thai politics. To counteract such systemic exclusion, international precedents offer viable solutions; for example, Serbia established the Women's Parliamentary Network to dismantle traditional male dominance, transforming an exclusive political system into a gender-responsive framework that successfully elevated women's parliamentary representation to 40% (Pajvančić et al., 2023).

Strategic Pathways for Enhancing Political Participation

To effectively increase women's participation in Chiang Mai's local governance and broader Thai politics, the research identifies two primary strategic interventions: shifting entrenched gender norms and implementing a formal gender quota system. First, transforming societal gender norms through heightened public awareness is imperative to challenge conventions that currently govern Thai society and recognize the critical importance of gender equality in politics (Sricharoenwong, 2021). Participants G (a non-elected representative) and I (an

academic) recommended that the government expand public education on the need for diverse political representation, advocating for selecting representatives based strictly on potential rather than gender identity. This is particularly relevant given Participant H's observation that the public often focuses superficially on female candidates' physical appearance rather than evaluating their professional skills and administrative potential. Consequently, as Songmatcha (2019) suggested, relevant government agencies and media outlets must strengthen public outreach concerning gender-equality-related political information to raise awareness and foster a deeper understanding of women's essential role in decision-making. If Thailand can successfully shift its cultural paradigms to expand women's roles, female political participation is likely to increase.

The efficacy of such normative shifts is well-documented internationally. For instance, UN Women's 'HeForShe' campaign serves as a robust mechanism for shifting traditional gender norms and promoting equality through public awareness, monitoring, social media engagement, and policy advocacy (UN Women, 2024a). For example, the United Kingdom launched a HeForShe Development Program in 2021 to challenge traditional workplace gender norms, increasing the proportion of female officers from 33% in 2021 to 35% in 2023 (UN Women, 2024b). Furthermore, the Greater Manchester Police Office exemplified best practices in addressing domestic and sexual abuse while enhancing female representation in senior positions; its HeForShe initiative provided capacity-building workshops and skills-based classes explicitly designed for women officers to challenge prevailing gender norms (HeForShe, 2023).

Second, implementing a mandated gender quota system is crucial to ensuring equitable representation. Such a system sets a minimum proportional threshold for women in political positions at all levels, which is essential for designing inclusive policies and supporting more comprehensive governance (Phujeenaphan, 2020). Sricharoenwong (2021) noted that allocating a specific proportion of seats for women at both national and local levels is a vital step toward promoting gender parity in Thailand. Accordingly, Participants B (a government official) and E (a member of the PAO council) strongly recommended that the government adopt a gender quota policy to promote parity in governance and political representation structurally. Participant E further elaborated that the Local Governance Act should include an additional measure requiring women to constitute at least 30% of representatives at all levels of government, while simultaneously obligating every government agency to implement policies and practices that consider gender equality. Furthermore, Participant H emphasized an intersectional approach, stating that a gender quota system must target all groups of women—including those in labor, education, minority, or disability sectors—to ensure that female representation accurately reflects the full diversity of society.

International precedents strongly support this structural approach. In European countries, legal frameworks explicitly ensure men and women participate freely and equally, and many states adopt quota systems to guarantee balanced decision-making representation (Margaras, 2025). Consequently, nations such as Belgium, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Spain, Austria, and the Netherlands have achieved female parliamentary representation exceeding 40% through these gender quotas (European Commission, 2025). Within the ASEAN context, Timor-Leste provides a compelling model; having adopted a gender quota system, the percentage of women in its parliament rose remarkably from 25% in 2001 to 39% in 2018, promoting gender parity, social transformation, and inclusive politics in which women participate fully (Niner et al., 2024). Importantly, this approach positioned Timor-Leste as the leading ASEAN nation, with the highest female representation in its national parliament at 35.4% in 2025 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2025a). Therefore, if Thailand formally adopts comparable quota systems, Chiang Mai—and the nation at large—can successfully achieve gender balance across

all governmental levels and substantially increase women's political participation, following the successful examples of EU countries and regional leaders.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study elucidates the complex interplay of enablers and barriers influencing women's political participation in Chiang Mai's local governance. The findings reveal that progressive social expectations and supportive legal frameworks significantly facilitate women's entry into the political arena. This is evidenced by Thailand's improved ranking in the Global Gender Gap Report and constitutional guarantees that nominally ensure equal political rights (Sivakriskul & Seip, 2020; Sricharoenwong, 2021; Sumano, 2025). Furthermore, government initiatives like the Women's Empowerment Fund (WEF) play a crucial role in fostering economic independence, which subsequently enhances women's confidence and willingness to engage in public affairs (Ongkan & Jewjinda, 2020; Sirimat & Sinthao, 2023). Conversely, deep-rooted patriarchal norms—both traditional Thai and specific Lanna cultural beliefs—persistently designate political leadership as a male domain, implicitly relegating women to domestic or supportive roles (Kitsuntorn & Eiamrerai, 2023; Sakrajai, 2018). Systemic barriers exacerbate these cultural constraints, particularly the structural exclusion of women from informal, male-dominated networks essential for political advancement (Samthong, 2022). To overcome these deeply ingrained obstacles, it is imperative to implement comprehensive strategies that actively dismantle traditional gender paradigms through sustained public awareness campaigns (Songmatcha, 2019). Concurrently, enforcing mandatory gender quota policies is critical to institutionalizing gender parity and fostering a truly inclusive governance structure at all administrative levels (Phujeenaphan, 2020; Sricharoenwong, 2021).

Recommendations

To sustainably enhance gender equality and augment women's participation in Chiang Mai's local governance and broader Thai politics, several strategic policy interventions are recommended. First, the government must prioritize comprehensive public awareness campaigns and integrate gender-diversity curricula into the national education framework. This initiative aims to fundamentally shift societal perceptions, ensuring that voters evaluate political representatives strictly on their administrative capacities rather than gender stereotypes. Second, institutionalizing gender quotas is essential; legislative amendments to the Political Parties Act should mandate at least 30% female representation across all political tiers. Political parties must consequently embed gender parity and diversity into their candidate selection processes to ensure broad, intersectional representation. Finally, funding must be strategically reallocated to targeted capacity-building programs at the provincial and district levels. Using established platforms such as the Women's Empowerment Fund, these programs should focus on building leadership, public speaking, and campaign management skills. Empowering informal political networks will not only boost women's confidence in political involvement but also foster a more inclusive and equitable democratic landscape.

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