

THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG WOMEN: GLOBAL BARRIERS AND STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

The political participation of young women is vital for enhancing democratic inclusivity and promoting gender equality. However, despite increasing global awareness, young women remain significantly underrepresented in political institutions. This underrepresentation is shaped by structural, cultural, and institutional barriers, including entrenched gender norms, unequal access to education and economic resources, male-dominated party structures, and various forms of political violence. Age-based discrimination further compounds these issues, producing intersectional exclusion.

This study employs a qualitative literature review grounded in feminist political theory, intersectionality, and participatory democracy to analyze the multidimensional constraints on young women's political participation. The discussion addresses systemic exclusion, strategies of resistance, and regional variations. For example, while gender quotas and youth-oriented reforms have fostered progress in Africa and Latin America, persistent patriarchal norms and restrictions on civic engagement continue to impede representation in the Middle East and South Asia.

Emerging avenues such as digital activism, youth-led movements, and transnational feminist networks offer new spaces for engagement. Mentorship and leadership development programs also strengthen political agency. Ultimately, enhancing young women's participation requires not only legal and institutional reform but also deep cultural transformation and sustained policy commitment. Such engagement is not solely a matter of justice; it is fundamental to building more inclusive and resilient democracies.

Keywords: Young Women, Political Participation, Gender Equality, Global Trends, Representation

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INTRODUCTION

The political participation of young women has increasingly become a focal point of scholarly debate due to its implications for democratic consolidation, social equity, and inclusive governance. The participation of women and youth in politics is not only a question of representation but also of the legitimacy and responsiveness of political systems (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Global studies demonstrate that countries with higher levels of women's political representation tend to adopt more inclusive policies, particularly in areas of education, health, and social welfare, thereby contributing to the resilience of democratic institutions (Paxton, Hughes, & Green, 2021; Krook, 2020). Despite these findings, young women continue to face systemic barriers in accessing formal political arenas, underscoring a critical gap between democratic ideals and social realities.

On a global scale, recent research shows that women hold only 26.9% of parliamentary seats worldwide, with young women under the age of 30 occupying an even smaller fraction of these positions (Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU], 2024). Structural obstacles such as gendered social norms, limited financial resources, and the male-dominated nature of political party hierarchies disproportionately affect young women, making their political advancement particularly challenging (World Economic Forum, 2025; UN Women, 2024). Comparative analyses reveal that while youth as a category are often more engaged in non-institutional political practices such as protests, petitions, and online activism, young women are less likely to translate this engagement into formal political leadership due to entrenched patriarchal structures (Grasso & Giugni, 2022).

In Türkiye, the gendered nature of political participation has been widely documented. Although women gained suffrage rights earlier than in many European countries (in 1930 for municipal elections and 1934 for general elections), their representation in political institutions has remained below global averages (Acar & Ayata, 2019). As of the 2023 general elections, women constitute approximately 20% of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, while local politics reflect even more profound disparities (İngün Karkış, 2023). Studies highlight that barriers such as the patriarchal organization of political parties, lack of intra-party support mechanisms, and societal perceptions of leadership as a masculine domain significantly constrain women's opportunities (Arat, 1989; Acar & Ayata, 2019). Furthermore, the underrepresentation of young women within this context is even more striking, as age-based hierarchies within party structures intersect with gender discrimination, producing compounded disadvantages.

Scholars examining Türkiye's political sphere emphasize that quota systems, while partially effective in improving descriptive representation, have not sufficiently addressed the structural and cultural impediments that inhibit young women's substantive participation (Aydemir & Koyuncu, 2020).

Local-level studies also reveal that women candidates often face higher financial burdens and lower access to campaign resources, which mirrors global findings about economic barriers to women's political empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2025). These dynamics highlight how global challenges in women's political participation are reproduced within the Turkish context, albeit with unique historical and cultural specificities.

In response, both international organizations and domestic actors have proposed a variety of interventions. The adoption of gender quotas, leadership training programs for young women, and mentorship initiatives by civil society organizations are increasingly recognized as crucial mechanisms for bridging the gap in political participation (UN Women Türkiye, 2022; UN Women, 2024). Empirical evidence from diverse contexts demonstrates that such measures not only enhance women's numerical presence but also contribute to more inclusive political agendas and strengthen democratic legitimacy (Krook, 2020; Paxton et al., 2021). Nevertheless, significant challenges remain, underscoring the need for continued empirical research and policy innovation.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to investigate the multifaceted factors that inhibit young women's political participation at both national and international levels. By integrating global and Türkiye specific scholarship, it seeks to analyse the structural, cultural, and institutional obstacles that shape young women's political trajectories. Through a comprehensive literature review and comparative analysis, the research will identify both recurring global patterns and country-specific dynamics, thereby contributing to the development of evidence-based recommendations for enhancing young women's representation in political leadership and decision-making.

Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to examine the barriers hindering young women's political representation and to explore their strategies of resistance and empowerment. The research not only addresses the challenges faced by young women but also analyzes regional disparities and evolving global trends. In doing so, it seeks to fill significant gaps in the literature on socio-political, cultural, and institutional obstacles limiting their political participation.

More specifically, the study investigates how these barriers vary across political and social environments, considering factors such as economic development, cultural traditions, and political systems. It examines the strategies young women employ to navigate and challenge constraints, highlighting regional and global patterns to propose practical policy recommendations for their empowerment.

Central to this study is the recognition that the political participation of women aged 18–30 is a vital dimension of democratic vitality and gender justice. This demographic represents a formative stage in political socialization, making it crucial to understand the influences shaping their sustained involvement.

The analysis also addresses intersectional challenges, including entrenched gender roles, limited economic independence, institutional discrimination, and media portrayals that marginalize young women's political agency. Beyond numerical representation, it emphasizes their substantive contributions to political discourse, rights-based policies, and inclusive governance.

Finally, the study explores innovative forms of engagement such as social media activism and youth-led movements, reflecting young women's adaptability in reshaping politics. Grounded in feminist political theory, participatory democracy, and representation theory, this research aspires to advance scholarly debate and inform policies that foster a more inclusive and equitable political environment for young women worldwide.

Method

This study adopts a quantitative systematic literature review design in order to investigate the political representation of young women, employing a transparent, replicable, and theoretically informed research strategy. The systematic review methodology was chosen because it allows for the rigorous synthesis of diverse sources, reduces potential bias in source selection, and provides a coherent analytical framework through which complex and multidisciplinary debates can be examined (Snyder, 2019). In line with established methodological standards in the social sciences, the review process entailed the systematic identification, screening, and in-depth analysis of academic and institutional materials that directly address or contribute to understanding the subject.

The data corpus encompassed a wide range of sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly monographs, governmental and non-governmental reports, and publications issued by international organizations. To ensure both empirical relevance and conceptual diversity, the inclusion criteria were carefully delineated. Publications from the last decade (2013–2023) were prioritized to capture contemporary debates and emerging trends, while foundational contributions were also incorporated to provide theoretical and historical depth. This dual focus made it possible to situate present-day dynamics within a broader trajectory of scholarly and policy-oriented inquiry. Sources were retrieved through leading academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and JSTOR, in addition to organizational repositories such as those maintained by UN Women and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, thereby ensuring the integration of both scholarly and practice-based perspectives.

The analytical phase of the review employed a thematic coding strategy designed to systematize and synthesize the literature. Texts were classified according to recurring analytical categories that emerged from iterative engagement with the material.

Three overarching themes were identified: (1) structural and institutional barriers to young women's political participation, (2) mechanisms and interventions devised to enhance political inclusion, and (3) comparative national and regional perspectives that highlight cross-contextual similarities and divergences. The coding process combined inductive and deductive logics, allowing both theoretically grounded and empirically emergent insights to be incorporated into the synthesis (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

To strengthen methodological rigor, triangulation was systematically applied by cross-verifying findings across different types of sources, including academic studies, statistical databases, and institutional reports. This procedure enhanced both the validity and reliability of the review by ensuring consistency in the evidence base and by mitigating biases associated with reliance on a single type of data. Furthermore, each stage of the research process ranging from data collection and eligibility screening to thematic synthesis was conducted in adherence to established standards of systematic review methodology within political science and gender studies (Snyder, 2019).

Finally, as the study relies exclusively on secondary data from publicly available scholarly and institutional sources, no ethical approval was required. Nonetheless, academic integrity was strictly maintained through accurate citation practices and compliance with internationally recognized standards of scholarly conduct. Collectively, this methodological framework establishes a robust and scientifically rigorous foundation for analyzing existing knowledge on young women's political participation in both global and Türkiye specific contexts, and provides the necessary basis for advancing theoretically informed and empirically grounded insights in subsequent sections of the study.

Findings

In order to comprehensively analyse the political representation of young women, it is first essential to clarify the key concepts and theoretical approaches that underpin this study. This chapter seeks to establish a conceptual and theoretical framework by defining and interrelating the notions of political representation, youth, and gender identity, which collectively shape the dynamics of young women's participation in political processes.

The initial phase of the analysis focuses on delineating these core concepts, including a detailed examination of political representation, the socio-political construct of youth, and the multifaceted nature of gender identity. Building on this conceptual groundwork, the study situates these constructs within an appropriate theoretical framework, enabling a nuanced understanding of the intersections among gender, age, and political agency.

1. POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Political representation broadly refers to the mechanisms through which individuals or groups express their interests, values, and identities within political institutions and decision-making processes. Theories of political representation encompass a variety of models, ranging from classical foundational perspectives to more contemporary trust-based frameworks, with many emphasizing the significance of identity in representation.

Hanna Pitkin's seminal work categorizes representation into distinct types, including formalistic, symbolic, and substantive representation, each elucidating different dimensions of the representative relationship (Pitkin, 1967). Building on this foundation, Jane Mansbridge's concept of descriptive representation is particularly salient in the context of young women and other marginalized groups. Mansbridge (1999) argues that representatives who share salient social identities, such as gender, ethnicity, or age, possess unique experiential knowledge that enables them to better articulate and advocate for the specific needs and interests of their constituencies.

This descriptive representation is especially critical for young women's political inclusion, as it acknowledges that the lived experiences and challenges they face are not readily understood or prioritized by representatives from dissimilar backgrounds. For instance, issues related to gender-based discrimination, reproductive rights, youth unemployment, and social inequalities are intricately linked to the identities of those affected, requiring representatives who can authentically voice these concerns within political forums.

Consequently, descriptive representation does not only enhance the visibility of marginalized groups but also contributes to more inclusive policy-making processes, ensuring that diverse perspectives inform governance. Thus, the concept is foundational to understanding why increasing the political presence of young women is vital for both substantive justice and democratic legitimacy.

2. YOUTH

The United Nations defines youth as a dynamic and evolving phase characterized by growth and development within a unique socio-cultural context. Typically, youth encompasses individuals aged between 15 and 29 years and is understood not merely as a demographic category but as a critical period of social participation, identity formation, and increasing autonomy (United Nations, 2019). This transitional stage is pivotal for shaping political attitudes, behaviors, and future engagement.

Youth political participation holds vital significance for the renewal and sustainability of democratic systems, as it ensures that political agendas and policies are responsive to the needs and aspirations of younger generations (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Despite this importance, the political representation of young people remains disproportionately low across numerous countries worldwide.

One key reason for this underrepresentation is the limited accessibility and openness of political institutions toward youth, which often results in structural and attitudinal barriers that inhibit their meaningful involvement (Henn & Foard, 2014).

In established democracies facing demographic aging, youth political participation assumes an even greater importance for democratic revitalization and policy responsiveness. However, the persistent global trend reveals that young people continue to be marginalized within political arenas, with institutions frequently failing to provide adequate channels for youth engagement or to recognize their specific interests and concerns.

This marginalization underscores the need to critically examine institutional frameworks and political cultures that hinder young people's inclusion. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of creating mechanisms that facilitate their representation, such as youth quotas, participatory platforms, and educational programs aimed at fostering political literacy and activism among young populations.

3. GENDER

Gender, distinct from biological sex, refers to the socially constructed roles, norms, and expectations assigned to individuals based on perceived differences between women and men. These gender norms profoundly influence social organization and power relations, often resulting in systemic disadvantages for women, particularly in political participation and representation (Krook, 2010). Women's exclusion from the public and political spheres can be directly attributed to entrenched gendered expectations that limit their opportunities and agency.

Gender-focused analyses in political science reveal persistent discrimination, structural barriers, and inequalities that restrict women's access to political power and decision-making roles. These analyses emphasize how societal norms not only shape women's political experiences but also influence policy outcomes, which frequently fail to address women's distinct needs and priorities. Understanding these gender dynamics is therefore essential for identifying the root causes of women's underrepresentation and for designing effective interventions.

3.1. Political Representation of Young Women: An Intersectional Approach

The political participation of young women exists at the critical intersection of age and gender, reflecting a complex interplay of multiple social identities and structural factors. This intersectionality framework, first articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), highlights how overlapping identities such as youth and womanhood interact to produce unique experiences of marginalization and exclusion. Young women's political representation is shaped by both gendered expectations and age-related norms, as well as broader social, cultural, and institutional structures (Htun & Ossa, 2013). They face dual layers of discrimination: gender-based biases that undermine women's political roles, and age-based biases that delegitimize youth participation. This intersectional disadvantage results in compounded barriers that differ qualitatively from those experienced by older women or young men alone.

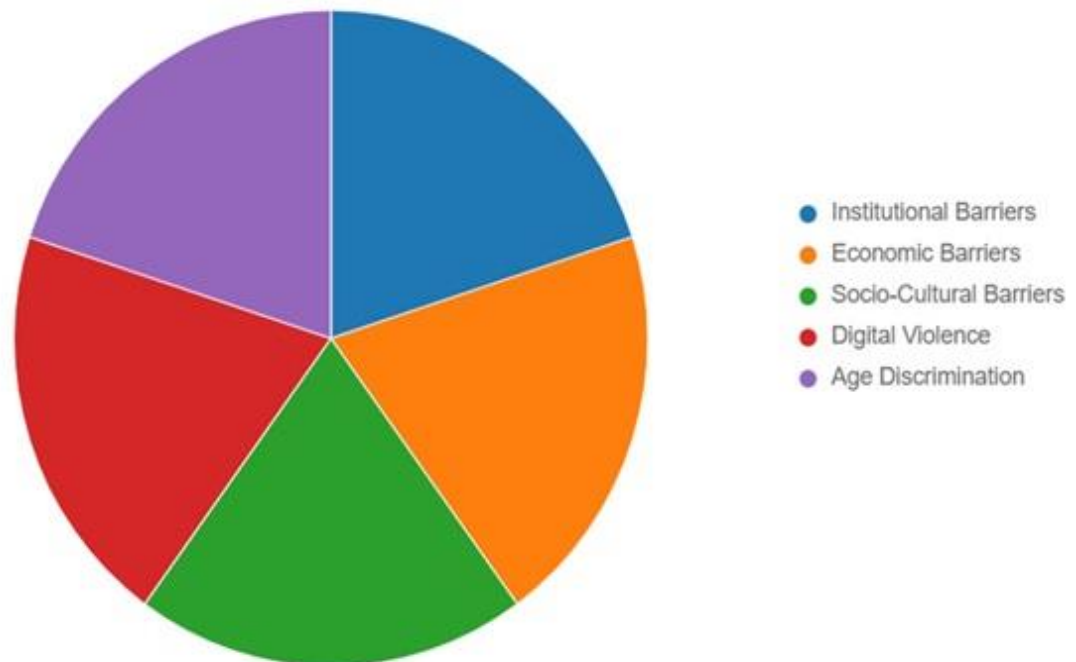
Scholars examining the political representation of young women underscore the necessity of adopting an intersectional lens to fully capture the complexity of their challenges and opportunities (Childs & Krook, 2009). This perspective enables a deeper understanding of how policies, political institutions, and societal attitudes simultaneously affect young women's inclusion and empowerment. Consequently, efforts to enhance young women's political participation must address both gender and age-related inequalities, fostering environments that recognize and value their distinctive contributions.

4. BARRIERS TO THE POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF YOUNG WOMEN

Despite increasing awareness of the importance of inclusive democratic participation, young women around the world continue to face a multitude of structural, cultural, and institutional barriers that significantly hinder their political representation. These multifaceted obstacles not only diminish their presence in formal political arenas but also contribute to persistently low representation rates, undermining the principles of democratic equality and justice.

Extensive literature on this subject identifies a range of interconnected barriers, including restrictive gender norms, unequal access to education and economic resources, the organization and culture of political institutions, media representation, and political violence (Krook, 2010; Celis, Childs, Kantola, & Krook, 2014). Understanding these barriers in their complexity is crucial to developing effective strategies to increase young women's political engagement and representation.

Figure 1: Main Barriers to Political Participation (Krook, 2010; Celis et al., 2014)



4.1. Gender Roles and Cultural Norms

One of the most deeply entrenched obstacles to young women's political participation lies in pervasive gender roles and cultural norms that confine women primarily to domestic and caregiving responsibilities. These norms often restrict young women's mobility and limit their access to public spaces where political activities typically occur (Krook, 2010). Such constraints are especially pronounced in patriarchal societies, where rigid social expectations reinforce women's exclusion from political life (Celis et al., 2014).

Empirical studies indicate that young women's engagement in political activities is often constrained by familial expectations and societal norms. In numerous cultural contexts, pursuing a political career can be perceived as incompatible with traditional gender roles, and women who participate in politics may face social disapproval or be regarded as threatening to family cohesion and communal honor. Such social and cultural pressures function as significant deterrents, limiting opportunities for young women to access leadership positions and participate fully in political life. This social disapproval often compels young women either to avoid politics altogether or to conceal their political engagement, thereby reducing their visibility and influence (Inglehart & Norris, 2003).

Furthermore, political institutions dominated by male leadership perpetuate the marginalization of young women by limiting their access to leadership positions and decision-making roles. This systemic exclusion not only hampers women's career progression but also diminishes their motivation to participate politically, reinforcing the cycle of underrepresentation (Paxton & Hughes, 2017).

4.2. Access To Education and Economic Resources

Education constitutes a critical determinant of political participation, serving as a gateway to political awareness, skills, and empowerment. Unfortunately, disparities in educational attainment often limit young women's political knowledge and confidence, constraining their capacity and motivation to engage in political processes (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Insufficient educational opportunities thus represent a significant barrier to meaningful political representation.

In parallel, economic resources and financial independence are essential for effective political participation. Campaigning, organizing, networking, and sustaining a political career require access to funding and economic stability, resources that young women disproportionately lack. Economic marginalization not only curtails their ability to compete in political arenas but also weakens their influence and agency within these spaces (Paxton & Hughes, 2017).

Global data underscore that in many regions, young women lag behind their male counterparts in terms of employment rates and access to economic opportunities (World Bank, 2020). This economic disparity not only restricts young women's visibility as viable political actors but also undermines their credibility and voice as decision-makers capable of representing diverse constituencies.

4.3. Barriers In Political Parties and Institutions

Political parties are conventionally regarded as critical gateways for political representation, serving as primary platforms through which women and youth can access formal political power. However, it remains a widely documented issue that these groups, particularly young women, are frequently marginalized or excluded during candidate selection and nomination processes (Krook, 2010).

The prevailing male-dominated organizational culture within parties continues to impede young women's progress, restricting their opportunities to secure top positions on electoral lists. This exclusion not only diminishes the visibility and electability of young women candidates but also indirectly affects the overall electoral success of the parties themselves by limiting their appeal to diverse electorates (Dahlerup, 2006).

Further barriers arise from entrenched institutional dynamics, such as patronage networks and informal power hierarchies, which often disadvantage young women due to their limited access to mentorship and supportive networks essential for political advancement (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Moreover, many young women report a disconnect with political parties, noting that party policies often fail to adequately address their specific concerns, thereby reducing their sense of political efficacy and belonging within these institutions (Childs & Krook, 2009).

4.4. Violence And Harassment in Politics

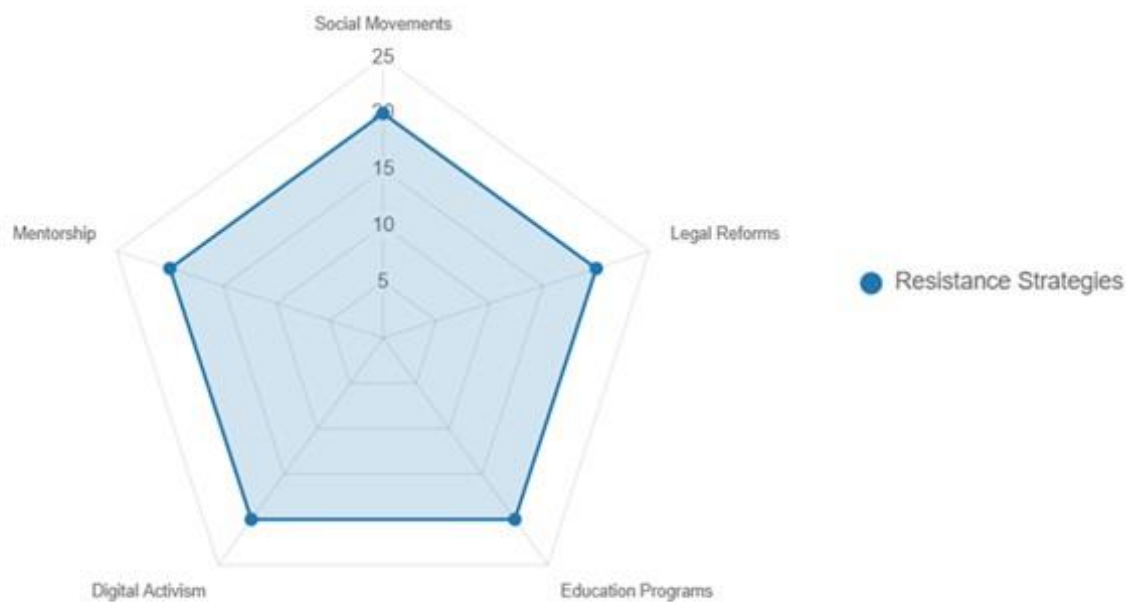
Violence and harassment, including sexual violence, psychological intimidation, and other forms of coercion, constitute significant deterrents to the political participation of young women. Such hostile environments can severely undermine the presence and persistence of young women in political spaces. Bjarnegård and Zetterberg emphasize that these attacks not only inflict individual harm but also have systemic effects by discouraging young women from continuing their political engagement or aspiring to leadership positions (Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2019).

The absence of robust legal protections and effective institutional mechanisms to address and prevent such violence exacerbates the problem, allowing these barriers to persist unchallenged. Consequently, many young women are deterred from seeking or maintaining positions of influence, particularly those that offer significant visibility or power, effectively narrowing the spectrum of female political leadership (Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2019).

5. STRUGGLES AND RESISTANCE STRATEGIES

In response to these structural, cultural, and institutional barriers, young women have developed a variety of struggles and resistance strategies aimed at enhancing their visibility, effectiveness, and political representation. These strategies manifest at both individual and collective levels, encompassing efforts within social spaces, political reforms, civil demands, activism, and the innovative use of digital platforms.

Figure 2: Distribution of Resistance Strategies for Young Women's Political Participation
(Krook, 2009; Tripp, 2015)



5.1. The Role of Social Movements and Civil Society

Social movements, particularly feminist and youth-led organizations, play a pivotal role in advancing the political representation of young women. These movements serve as crucial arenas for organizing transformative struggles for rights, increasing public awareness, and amplifying young women's voices in political discourses.

In the 21st century, young women's political engagement has become increasingly dynamic and fluid, with movements led by young women forging new coalitions to collectively challenge entrenched inequalities in political representation. Civil society organizations have been instrumental in this process by facilitating leadership training programs, fostering political campaigns, and building networks that empower young women to engage more effectively in politics.

Positive examples of these initiatives include the establishment of new platforms across Latin America and Africa, where young women's political representation has seen notable advances due to sustained civil society activism and coalition-building (Tripp, 2015). These developments underscore the transformative potential of organized collective action in overcoming systemic barriers and enhancing young women's political agency.

5.2. Legal and Political Reforms

Over recent decades, numerous legal and political reforms have been introduced worldwide with the explicit aim of enhancing women's representation in political institutions. Among these, the implementation of gender quotas stands out as one of the most prominent and widely debated mechanisms. Quotas function as affirmative action policies that compel political parties to nominate a specified minimum percentage of women candidates, thereby institutionalizing gender inclusivity within electoral systems. Krook (2009) emphasizes that such quotas are often the most effective tools to overcome historical and structural barriers limiting women's political participation. Similarly, Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2005) highlight that quota systems can significantly increase both the number and influence of women in legislatures, particularly when combined with broader political and societal support.

In addition to gender quotas, several countries have introduced targeted legislation to promote youth participation in political decision-making processes. These legal frameworks are designed to ensure that young people, including young women, have formal avenues to engage in policymaking and governance. The United Nations Development Programme's (2016) report underscores the critical importance of such youth-inclusive policies, asserting that they not only increase the visibility of young women in political arenas but also enrich democratic processes by incorporating diverse perspectives.

5.3. Education And Capacity Building Programs

The political empowerment of young women is closely linked to their access to education and participation in capacity-building initiatives. Such programs serve as foundational platforms that equip young women with essential political literacy, leadership skills, and practical knowledge about policy development and governance.

Programs like the "Young Women Leadership Programs," implemented in various countries, aim to foster confidence, strategic thinking, and active political participation among young women. These initiatives transform participants from passive observers into influential actors within local governments, political parties, and civil society. By bridging gaps in knowledge and addressing social and psychological barriers, capacity-building programs enable young women to navigate political landscapes more effectively, thus enhancing their potential for political leadership and influence.

5.4. Digital Activism and New Media Tools

In the contemporary digital era, digital activism has emerged as a potent instrument for young women striving for political representation. Social media platforms and new media technologies provide unprecedented opportunities to amplify marginalized voices, mobilize support, and disseminate political messages to vast audiences at low cost (Theocharis et al., 2015).

Through digital campaigns, hashtag activism, online forums, and virtual communities, young women are able to circumvent traditional gatekeepers of political discourse, challenge dominant narratives, and foster solidarity across geographic and cultural boundaries (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). These platforms also facilitate rapid responses to political developments, enabling agile and dynamic engagement.

Nevertheless, the digital sphere poses significant challenges, including exposure to cyberbullying, online harassment, and gender-based violence, which can deter participation and impose psychological costs. Therefore, effective digital activism must be paired with protective strategies and robust policies to safeguard young women activists from these risks, ensuring that the digital realm remains a safe and empowering space for political engagement (Citron, 2014).

6. MENTORSHIP AND NETWORKING

Mentorship and professional networks play a pivotal role in facilitating young women's political engagement and success. According to political science literature, mentorship is understood as a sustained, supportive relationship through which experienced individuals share knowledge, guidance, and opportunities, thereby fostering the professional development of mentees (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

In the context of young women's political participation, mentorship provided by seasoned female politicians and activists is especially critical for navigating complex political systems and overcoming gendered barriers. Such relationships offer not only practical support but also emotional encouragement, reinforcing resilience and confidence.

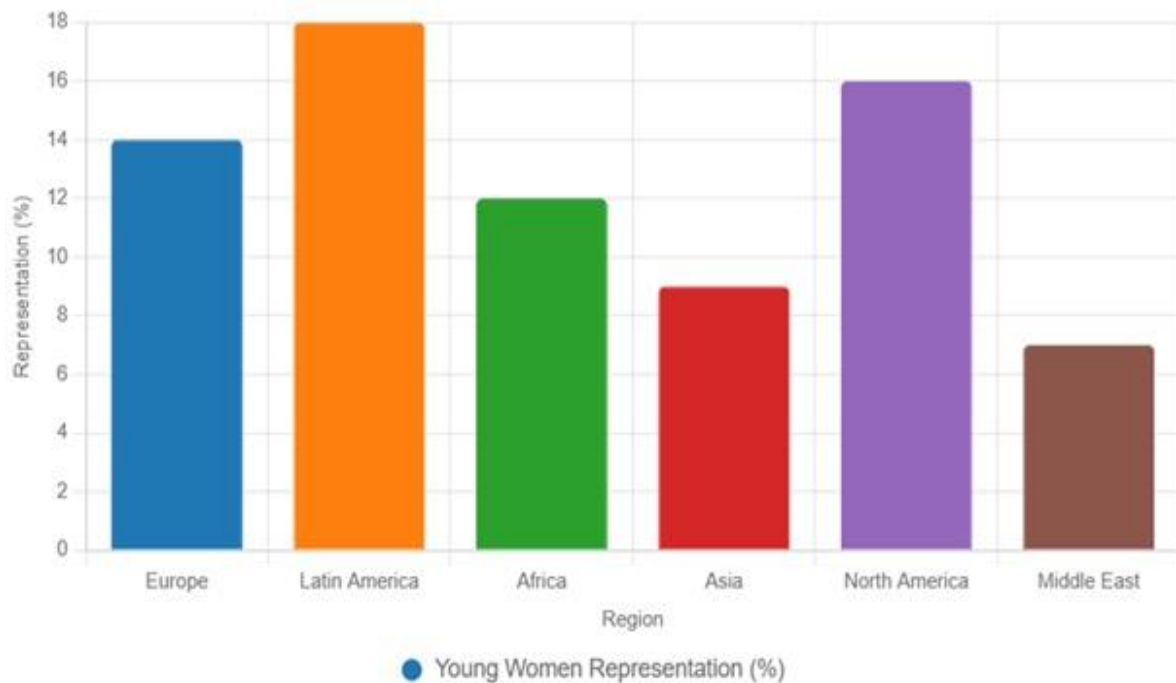
Furthermore, networks and platforms dedicated to young women in politics function as vital spaces for information exchange, solidarity-building, and collective action. These networks help combat feelings of isolation, promote peer learning, and create channels for joint advocacy, thus substantially enhancing the capacity and visibility of young women within political fields (Childs & Krook, 2009).

7. GLOBAL TRENDS AND REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

The political representation of young women has increasingly gained recognition as a critical dimension in global democratic development. While awareness and initiatives to enhance their participation are growing, it remains essential to carefully examine regional variations and contextual factors that influence these dynamics.

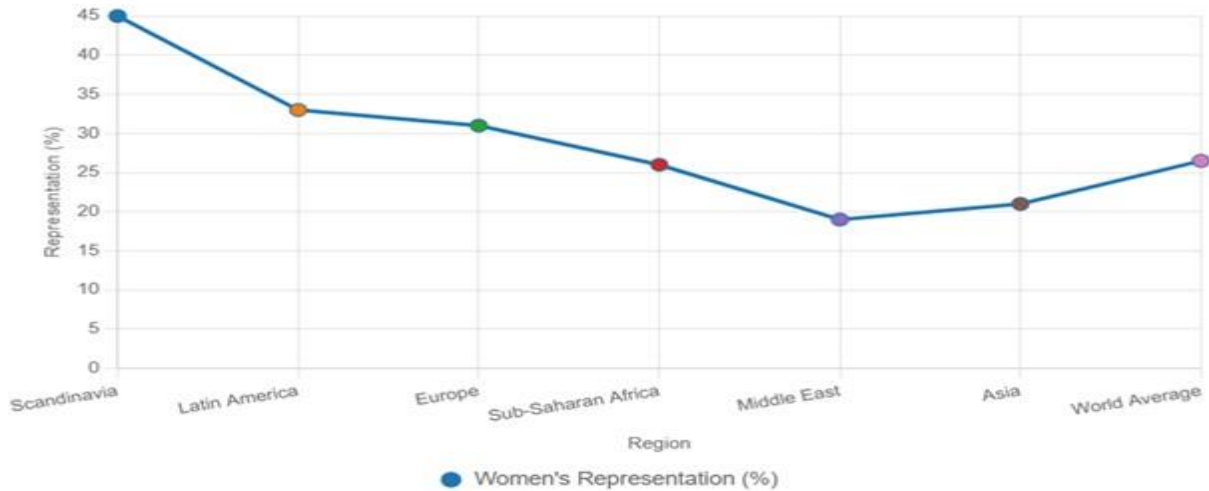
This section provides a comprehensive overview of global trends in young women's political representation, followed by an in-depth analysis of regional disparities across Africa, Latin America, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Emphasis is placed on understanding the socio-cultural, economic, and political factors that shape these regional differences.

Figure 3: Political Representation Rates of Young Women (IPU & UN Women, 2021)



7.1. Global Trends

Despite a notable rise in political participation rates among young women in recent years, their overall representation in formal political institutions continues to be disproportionately low. Globally, women occupy approximately 26% of parliamentary seats; however, this figure significantly declines when isolating the subset of young female politicians (UN Women, 2022). This persistent underrepresentation signals enduring structural and systemic challenges.

Figure 4: Women's Representation Rates in Parliament (IPU, 2023)

In response, numerous international organizations, intergovernmental bodies, and civil society groups have formulated policy recommendations and launched programs specifically aimed at increasing young women's political engagement and representation (Krook, 2010). These efforts typically include the promotion of women's quotas, the enactment of youth-targeted legal frameworks, and the implementation of capacity-building initiatives designed to empower young women politically.

Additionally, the forces of globalization and rapid digitalization have facilitated the emergence of transnational networks and platforms. These enable young women to share experiences, mobilize collectively, and disseminate innovative strategies for political engagement across borders, thereby contributing to the strengthening of their global political voice (Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga & Mungwa, 2009).

7.2. Africa

Africa exhibits some of the most remarkable advancements in the political representation of young women. Several African nations have achieved significant progress through the adoption of women's quotas and legislative measures supporting youth inclusion in politics (Bauer & Burnet, 2013). Rwanda exemplifies this progress, boasting one of the highest proportions of women parliamentarians worldwide, exceeding 60%, and young women in Rwanda have substantially benefited from this inclusive political environment (Tripp, 2015).

Nonetheless, this progress is not uniform across the continent. In numerous African regions, entrenched gender norms, economic hardship, and sociopolitical instability continue to restrict young women's access to political arenas (Mama, 2011). Additionally, ethnic and regional conflicts exacerbate these challenges by further marginalizing young women from formal political participation (Tripp, 2015).

7.3. Latin America

In Latin America, the political representation of young women reflects a complex interplay of progress and persistent obstacles. Institutional mechanisms such as women's quotas and the establishment of local youth councils represent significant efforts to bolster young women's political inclusion (Htun & Ossa, 2013). These initiatives have contributed to incremental increases in representation rates.

However, political volatility, widespread social inequalities, and high levels of societal violence undermine these advances and continue to constrain young women's full participation in politics (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008). Despite these adversities, young women in the region actively engage in social movements and civil society organizations as strategies of resistance and empowerment, advocating for greater political inclusion and gender equality (Schwindt-Bayer, 2010).

7.4. Asia

Asia presents a diverse and multifaceted landscape regarding young women's political representation, marked by significant variation across subregions and countries. In South Asia, deeply entrenched gender norms, rigid class structures, and socio-political constraints pose substantial obstacles for young women aspiring to political roles. Countries such as Pakistan and India exemplify these challenges, where traditional patriarchal values continue to limit young women's political agency (Krook, 2010).

Conversely, nations like Bangladesh and the Philippines have witnessed relatively higher levels of female political leadership, which positively influences young women's political participation in these contexts (Tripp et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, in many East Asian countries, despite considerable advancements in education and economic development, cultural barriers remain a formidable impediment to increasing the political representation of young women, resulting in persistently low participation rates (World Bank, 2021).

7.5. Europe

Europe has achieved relatively high levels of women's political representation compared to many other regions worldwide; however, the political representation of young women remains an area requiring further improvement (European Institute for Gender Equality [EIGE], 2022). Northern European countries, particularly the Nordic states such as Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark, are often highlighted for their progressive and comprehensive policies promoting gender equality and youth participation. These countries implement targeted educational programs, mentorship opportunities, and legislative frameworks that actively support the political engagement of young women (Dahlerup, 2006).

However, significant disparities exist between Western and Eastern Europe, shaped by divergent historical trajectories, socio-political contexts, and cultural legacies (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). In Western Europe, democratic consolidation and gender equality movements have fostered higher participation rates of young women in political processes. In contrast, Eastern European countries are still navigating the consequences of post-communist democratic transitions, which influence institutional openness and societal attitudes toward young women's political participation. Nevertheless, recent years have witnessed gradual improvements in representation rates among young women in Eastern Europe, reflecting broader democratization trends and increased advocacy for inclusive governance (Krook, 2010).

7.6. Middle East And North Africa (MENA)

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region presents some of the most significant challenges for young women's political representation globally. Deeply entrenched patriarchal social structures, restrictions on political freedoms, and ongoing conflict or instability severely constrain young women's opportunities to engage politically (Moghadam, 2003). Societal norms often emphasize traditional gender roles that confine women primarily to domestic spheres, limiting their public and political agency.

Despite these formidable obstacles, the last decade has seen a notable rise in young women's political activism, particularly through digital means. Social media platforms and other online spaces have become critical venues for young women to express political demands, mobilize support, and participate in feminist and youth movements (Abu-Lughod, 2013). This digital activism challenges traditional gatekeeping in political arenas and fosters new forms of political participation that circumvent physical and institutional barriers.

In addition, legal reforms inspired by international human rights frameworks and pressure from global actors have begun to create openings for greater political inclusion of young women in the region (United Nations, 2019). Some MENA countries have introduced quota systems and youth participation initiatives, though their implementation and impact vary widely.

7.7. Case Studies

This study highlights the complex and multifaceted barriers that young women face in attaining meaningful political representation, as well as the diverse strategies they employ to navigate, resist, and transform these obstacles. The findings demonstrate that structural, cultural, and institutional factors interact in intricate and context-dependent ways, generating significant challenges to political inclusion. While some barriers such as entrenched gender stereotypes, patriarchal social norms, and discriminatory political practices are pervasive across global contexts, regional, cultural, and socio-economic variations critically shape the specific experiences and opportunities available to young women in political arenas (Plan International, 2022; Flanagan & Levine, 2010).

Structural impediments, including economic disparities, restricted access to high-quality education, and limited access to political networks, continue to constrain young women's ability to participate as candidates and achieve electoral success. Concurrently, cultural and normative barriers such as societal expectations regarding gender roles and biased perceptions of leadership affect both external support for young women's political participation and their internalized sense of political efficacy. Empowerment strategies, including engagement in feminist and youth-led social movements, digital activism, targeted mentorship programs, and international solidarity networks, have emerged as critical mechanisms to enhance young women's visibility, agency, and leadership capacities (World Bank, 2013; UN Women, 2024).

7.7.1. Türkiye

In Türkiye, young women's political participation is often constrained by deeply rooted patriarchal norms, family expectations, and societal gender stereotypes. Despite these challenges, institutional initiatives such as local youth councils, women's branches within political parties, and legislatively mandated gender quotas have provided structured pathways for young women to engage in political life at local and regional levels. These mechanisms function synergistically with empowerment programs, enabling young women to acquire political skills, leadership experience, and access to decision-making arenas (IPU, 2024). The Turkish context illustrates the importance of aligning structural interventions with cultural and empowerment strategies to facilitate substantive participation.

7.7.2. Rwanda

Rwanda presents a compelling example of how robust institutional frameworks can overcome cultural and structural barriers. Following the 1994 genocide, Rwanda implemented constitutional reforms and legislatively mandated gender quotas, resulting in one of the highest levels of women's parliamentary representation globally. Young women benefit from institutionalized mentorship programs, party-led leadership initiatives, and supportive political networks, which collectively mitigate the effects of traditional gender norms and economic constraints (Krook, 2020; UN Women, 2024). Rwanda's case underscores the critical role of institutional support mechanisms and formalized policies in promoting young women's political agency and sustainable representation.

7.7.3. Latin America: Brazil and Colombia

In Brazil and Colombia, young women's political participation has been shaped significantly by feminist and youth-led social movements, digital advocacy, and grassroots mobilization. Social media platforms and online campaigns have provided avenues for young women to raise awareness, amplify their voices, and influence policy debates.

Despite these advancements, structural and contextual challenges including electoral violence, persistent economic inequality, and political clientelism continue to limit opportunities for meaningful participation (World Economic Forum, 2025; Plan International, 2022). These cases highlight the interplay between empowerment strategies and structural constraints, emphasizing the need for integrated interventions.

These case studies collectively illustrate that young women's political engagement is neither uniform nor solely determined by a single factor; rather, it results from the interaction of structural, cultural, and individual-level determinants. In this context, the proposed Youth Gendered Political Engagement Model (YGPEM) provides a comprehensive analytical lens to understand the dynamics of young women's political participation. The model situates structural factors (e.g., quotas, education, economic resources), cultural norms (e.g., gender expectations, societal attitudes), and individual-level determinants (e.g., political efficacy, leadership skills) in relation to empowerment mechanisms and institutional supports. By applying this framework to diverse contexts—such as Türkiye, Rwanda, and Latin America researchers and policymakers can identify critical leverage points for intervention, tailor context-sensitive strategies, and systematically enhance young women's political engagement.

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive literature review has elucidated the multifaceted barriers that young women encounter in achieving meaningful political representation, alongside the diverse strategies they employ to navigate, resist, and transform these obstacles. The findings indicate that structural, cultural, and institutional barriers interact in complex ways, creating significant challenges to political inclusion. While certain barriers, such as gender stereotypes, patriarchal norms, and discriminatory political practices, are pervasive across global contexts, important regional, cultural, and socio-economic variations shape the specific experiences and opportunities of young women in political arenas.

Structural impediments, including economic disparities, restricted access to high-quality education, and limited exposure to political networks, further constrain young women's ability to participate as candidates and succeed in electoral processes. Simultaneously, cultural and normative barriers including entrenched gender expectations and biased perceptions of leadership continue to influence both societal support for women's political participation and young women's own self-perceptions of political efficacy. Notably, young women have developed and leveraged diverse empowerment strategies, including digital activism, participation in feminist and youth-led social movements, targeted mentorship programs, and international solidarity networks, which enhance visibility, agency, and leadership capacities.

Building on these insights, a series of evidence-based, actionable recommendations can be proposed to advance young women's political representation. These recommendations are designed to address structural, cultural, and institutional barriers in an integrated and systematic manner:

1. Institutional and Legislative Reforms:

- Implement and rigorously enforce gender quotas at both national and local levels, ensuring that young women have equitable opportunities to stand for election and hold office (Krook, 2020; UN Women, 2024).
- Reform political party structures to promote transparent candidate selection processes, institutionalize mentorship mechanisms, and actively recruit young women for leadership positions.

2. Capacity-Building and Leadership Development:

- Establish targeted leadership training programs that equip young women with political skills, strategic knowledge, and negotiation capacities essential for effective participation (Paxton, Hughes, & Green, 2021).
- Develop formal mentorship and networking programs connecting aspiring young female leaders with experienced politicians and civil society actors.

3. Economic Empowerment Measures:

- Introduce financial support schemes, including campaign grants, subsidies, and micro-funding programs for young female candidates, to address systemic economic barriers (World Economic Forum, 2025).
- Ensure equitable access to political campaign infrastructure and resources to reduce disparities in electoral competitiveness.

4. Educational and Awareness Interventions:

- Promote political literacy and gender-sensitive civic education within schools and universities to cultivate awareness of political processes and empower young women to engage actively (Flanagan & Levine, 2010).
- Conduct public awareness campaigns to challenge prevailing gender stereotypes and encourage societal recognition of women's leadership potential.

5. Protection and Policy Safeguards:

- Enact and enforce legislation against gender-based discrimination and harassment in political settings, ensuring safe and inclusive political environments.
- Incorporate intersectional approaches to policymaking, considering the compounded disadvantages faced by young women from marginalized socio-economic or ethnic backgrounds.

6. Digital and Civil Society Engagement:

- Support the creation of online platforms, social media initiatives, and youth-focused organizations that amplify young women's voices and facilitate political mobilization.

- Encourage collaboration between NGOs, international agencies, and local communities to provide training and resources for digital advocacy and policy engagement.

7. **Cross-Regional Knowledge Exchange:**

- Facilitate international and regional partnerships to share best practices and lessons learned regarding young women's political empowerment.
- Adapt successful policy interventions from regions with higher political inclusion of young women to local contexts, taking into account cultural and institutional specificities.

It is particularly noteworthy that an original conceptual framework or model can be proposed to systematically explain young women's political participation. Such a framework would integrate structural, cultural, and individual-level determinants, alongside empowerment mechanisms and institutional supports, providing a robust analytical tool for both scholarly investigation and policy formulation. By emphasizing the interactions between multi-level factors, this approach allows researchers and policymakers to identify critical leverage points, assess the relative influence of intersecting determinants, and develop targeted, context-sensitive strategies to enhance young women's political engagement across diverse socio-political environments.

In conclusion, advancing the political representation of young women requires integrated, evidence-based strategies that simultaneously address structural, cultural, and institutional impediments. Progress in this area is not only crucial for achieving gender equity but also for enhancing the legitimacy, responsiveness, and resilience of democratic governance globally. By implementing targeted reforms, fostering leadership capacities, and promoting inclusive political environments, policymakers, civil society actors, and international organizations can collectively strengthen young women's agency, representation, and impact in political processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively increase the political representation of young women, comprehensive, multi-stakeholder, and sustainable policy proposals are necessary. These recommendations are organized into seven key areas:

I. Legal and Institutional Reforms

- **Integration of women's and youth quotas:** Existing women's quotas should be revised to explicitly include age-related criteria, ensuring that political parties prioritize young women candidates. This dual quota approach will help overcome the tendency to favor older women and improve the electoral viability of young women.
- **Mandatory equal representation and transparency:** Political parties must institutionalize gender and youth representation mandates within their internal statutes.

Transparent candidate selection processes with clear accountability mechanisms will guarantee that young women have equitable opportunities for nomination and leadership roles.

- **Anti-discrimination and harassment mechanisms:** Robust legal frameworks and enforcement bodies should be established to prevent and respond to discrimination, sexual harassment, and psychological violence against young women in political contexts. This will create safer and more inclusive political environments.

II. Education and Capacity Building

- **Political leadership and participation education:** Governments and educational institutions should implement comprehensive political literacy and leadership programs targeting young women from early education through higher education. These programs must focus on skills such as public speaking, campaign management, policy analysis, and civic engagement.
- **Gender sensitivity education:** Curricula at all levels should incorporate gender equality training to dismantle harmful stereotypes and foster a culture of inclusivity and respect for women's political participation.
- **Civil society-supported capacity building:** NGOs and grassroots organizations should be resourced to conduct workshops, mentorship, and skill-building seminars that equip young women with practical political knowledge and networking opportunities.

III. Social and Cultural Transformation

- **Media and communication strategies:** Media outlets must actively promote the political achievements and leadership of young women to create positive role models and challenge societal prejudices. This includes dedicating airtime, publishing feature stories, and producing documentaries or interviews that amplify young women's voices.
- **Awareness campaigns:** Governments, civil society, and international organizations should collaborate on large-scale campaigns emphasizing the importance of young women's political participation, targeting schools, families, and communities to shift cultural norms.
- **Family and community engagement:** Programs aimed at educating families and local communities about the benefits of young women's political involvement will help reduce social pressures and provide emotional and practical support for aspiring young women politicians.

IV. Effective Use of Digital Platforms

- **Supporting digital activism:** Recognizing the pivotal role of digital tools, targeted training should be provided to enhance young women's skills in social media advocacy, digital campaigning, and online mobilization.
- **Cybersecurity and protection measures:** Digital platforms and relevant institutions must implement protective mechanisms against online harassment, cyberbullying, and gender-based digital violence, ensuring safe virtual spaces for young women activists.

V. Mentorship and Network Building

- **Mentorship from experienced women leaders:** Institutionalized mentorship programs linking young women with seasoned female politicians and activists will provide guidance, knowledge transfer, and emotional support critical to navigating political landscapes.
- **Creation of political networks:** Establishing and supporting young women's political networks at local, national, and international levels will foster solidarity, share resources, and amplify collective political influence.

VI. Research and Data Collection

- **Comprehensive data systems:** National statistical agencies and international organizations must prioritize the collection of disaggregated data on young women's political participation, candidacy, and election outcomes to identify gaps and track progress.
- **Academic and policy research:** Funding and promoting interdisciplinary research focused on young women's political engagement will strengthen evidence-based policymaking and innovation in program design.

VII. International Cooperation and Funding

- **Enhanced international support programs:** Donors and multilateral organizations should increase financial resources and technical assistance for initiatives that empower young women politically, prioritizing regions with significant representation gaps.
- **Global experience sharing:** Mechanisms to share successful policies, programs, and advocacy models across countries and regions will enable adaptation of best practices tailored to local contexts.

These multifaceted recommendations recognize the complexity of barriers faced by young women in politics and emphasize the need for coordinated efforts that address legal, educational, social, technological, and institutional dimensions. Implementing these strategies will contribute significantly to advancing gender equality and democratic inclusivity worldwide.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study's reliance on a qualitative literature review methodology presents certain limitations. First, the absence of primary field data restricts the ability to capture real-time, context-specific experiences of young women in politics. Second, the literature reviewed is predominantly in English and Turkish, potentially excluding valuable studies in other languages. Third, data gaps in some regions, particularly in developing countries, limit the comprehensiveness of regional analyses. Finally, the dynamic nature of political participation means that emerging trends may outpace academic documentation.

To address these limitations, future research should adopt mixed-methods approaches, combining qualitative and quantitative data. The following fieldwork recommendations are proposed:

1. **In-Depth Interviews:** Conducting semi-structured interviews with young women politicians (ages 18–30) in underrepresented regions, such as the Middle East or South Asia, would provide nuanced insights into their lived experiences. For example, interviews in Türkiye could explore how young women navigate municipal politics amidst cultural and institutional barriers.
2. **Focus Groups:** Organizing focus groups with young female activists in regions with successful quota systems (e.g., Rwanda, Scandinavia) could reveal best practices for political empowerment. These discussions could explore mentorship, digital activism, and community support dynamics.
3. **Social Media Analysis:** Expanding the thematic analysis of hashtags like #SiyasetteKadın to include multiple countries (e.g., #WomenInPolitics globally) would provide comparative insights into digital activism trends. Real-time data collection using tools like Twitter/X APIs could track evolving narratives.
4. **Participatory Action Research:** Engaging young women as co-researchers in designing and conducting studies would ensure that research reflects their priorities and perspectives. This approach could be piloted in Latin America, where youth-led movements are prominent.
5. **Longitudinal Studies:** Tracking young women's political participation over time (e.g., 5–10 years) in specific countries would reveal the long-term impact of reforms like quotas or mentorship programs. For instance, a study in Brazil could assess how youth councils influence young women's candidacy rates.

These fieldwork approaches would complement the current literature review by providing original data, addressing regional data gaps, and capturing the evolving nature of young women's political engagement. Multilingual research teams and digital tools, such as social media monitoring, could further enhance the diversity and timeliness of future studies.

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