



WOMEN IN THE FACE OF SRI LANKAN POLITICS: A LITERATURE REVIEW BASED ON A BACKGROUND STUDY OF WOMEN IN SRI LANKA

RB Prabodha Rathnayake

General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

Gender diversity in leadership is essential from economic, political, and social perspectives in any society. This study explores the underlying causes of the underrepresentation of women in political leadership in Sri Lanka and proposes policy recommendations to address the identified barriers. A qualitative descriptive design was employed, based on a comprehensive review of relevant literature. Peer-reviewed articles and data published between 2015 and 2024 by the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and the Department of Census and Statistics were analyzed. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring concepts and patterns across the selected literature. The findings highlight several key factors contributing to the limited participation of women in leadership roles, including the influence of higher education, the legal framework, and entrenched cultural norms. Among these, the legal structure and sociocultural environment emerged as the primary impediments, significantly constraining women's engagement in leadership at the grassroots level. The study concludes that the existing legal framework and prevailing cultural norms exert a strong influence on women's political participation. To address these challenges, it is recommended that the government implement targeted policies to enhance women's political engagement, such as expanding access to higher education, reforming institutional mechanisms that reinforce cultural barriers, and empowering women to develop self-confidence and leadership-relevant competencies.

KEYWORDS: Culture, Decision-making, Leadership, Legal Structure, Politics, Women

Corresponding Author: R.B. Prabodha Rathnayake: Email: prabodharathnayake71@gmail.com



<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2444-8419>



This is an open-access article licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY) allowing distribution and reproduction in any medium, crediting the original author and source.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender diversity in leadership is vital from economic, political, and social perspectives in any society. Women's participation in political leadership is not merely a matter of representation but a powerful avenue for achieving broader gender equality. As Praneeth Kaur, an Indian politician and former government official, aptly stated, "Politics is a potent way to empower women," emphasizing the crucial role that political engagement plays in transforming women's status in society (ElectHer, 2021).

Over the decades, women have made notable strides in many spheres. For instance, the average female literacy rate increased from 76% in 1985 to 90%, reflecting substantial progress in educational attainment (UNICEF, 2019). Similarly, key areas such as education, socio-cultural norms, and legal frameworks have undergone meaningful evolution. These developments have collectively contributed to the emergence of the modern woman: educated, informed, and increasingly assertive in both public and private domains.

However, women's representation in the political arena remains significantly low compared to other sectors led by women. For instance, women constitute 36% of senior academic positions in universities (Araneda-Guirriman et al., 2023), hold approximately 28.25% of executive positions globally (Rathnayake, 2024), and account for 47% of the entry-level workforce (Mallorie Bowling, 2024). Certain scholars have found the common lags of underrepresentation of women in politics. Women's lack of time for politics due to domestic obligations, lack of socialization, lower social capital in the schools and in the general society, lack of interest due to cultural barriers, marginalization within male-dominated society, and difficulty in overcoming the incumbent bias in the electoral system have built a slow progression in the political representation of women (Matland and Taylor, 1997; Randall, 1987; Rule, 1981 as cited in Goetz, 2003, p.03)

Despite notable progress, women continue to lag behind in several key areas, including political participation, access to healthcare, and opportunities

in the labour market (United Nations, 2020). Given the multifaceted nature of women's underrepresentation in society, this study focuses specifically on the political sphere, with an emphasis on the representation of women in politics in Sri Lanka.

According to the United Nations (2005), women are less likely to be represented in politics because of inadequate support from political parties, a male-dominated political culture, a lack of gender-friendly legal structure, and a lack of support through the education system. Hence, women's level of education, legal structure towards diversified gender participation, and social and cultural norms embedded in each country have been influenced to determine the level of female involvement.

Education is widely regarded as a fundamental driver of economic, political, and social development in any context (Rathnayake, 2024). Over the years, the trend of women attaining higher education has shown significant growth. Currently, women account for 53% of university graduates worldwide (UNESCO, 2020), indicating a positive shift toward greater educational equity. Nevertheless, the overall women's leadership indicates a 'leaky pipe syndrome' because only 23.3% of women signified the world and regional share of female cabinet ministers in 2024 (UN Women, 2024). The school system indirectly affects political commitment, which benefits from school government, clubs, sports, and school newspapers that exercise leadership and enhance civic and bureaucratic skills (Goetz, 2003). Generally, men are more interested in educational, extracurricular activities, media events, or political discussions in schools or universities (Lawless Fox, 2013). These shreds of evidence highlight the deficiency of gender diversity in leadership, and especially, well-educated women have not shown interest in engaging in politics.

Although women's academic performances are sufficient to be appointed or elected as leaders, socially embedded values, cultural beliefs, and norms are dragging women into subordinate positions. Hence, the main bottleneck is caused by the social expectations and stereotypes towards women.

Although there are biological differences between men and women, societies should not be male-dominated. Every nation deserves capable leadership, regardless of gender, without discrimination.

To promote women as national leaders, many countries have introduced rules, regulations, and customs aimed at ensuring gender equality. These legal frameworks are designed to support balanced participation in economic, political, and social spheres. However, despite these efforts, the OECD (2020) reports that a significant number of qualified women still do not occupy the positions they merit, even though they are legally entitled to challenge discrimination.

Women's access to education in Sri Lanka is at a relatively acceptable level, as reflected in the country's ranking in the Educational Attainment sub-index of the Global Gender Gap Index 2024, where Sri Lanka is placed 49th out of 153 countries (World Economic Forum, 2024). Notably, the country ranks 82nd in terms of average literacy rate. However, this educational progress has not translated into political representation. In 2024, women constituted only 5.3% of the Sri Lankan national parliament, holding just 12 out of 225 seats: none of whom were from Tamil or Muslim communities (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2022). In terms of political empowerment, Sri Lanka ranks 135th out of 153 countries, indicating a severe disparity between educational attainment and political inclusion (World Economic Forum, 2024).

This stark contrast between educational attainment and political representation suggests that formal access to education alone is not sufficient to ensure women's participation in governance. While Sri Lankan women are increasingly qualified and literate, systemic barriers such as patriarchal norms, party-level discrimination, lack of financial support, and inadequate political mentorship continue to hinder their entry and advancement in political life.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to observe the main causes that discourage women's participation in leadership and decision-making in the political arena.

Research Questions

According to the Global Gender Gap Index (GGI), Sri Lanka has been highlighted for its significant gaps in women's participation in both politics and economic activities (Global Gender Gap, 2021). The political dimension of the index reflects how political decisions are made and who participates in those processes. Statistics reveal a clear issue regarding the underrepresentation of women in decision-making platforms. In response to this concern, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are the underlying reasons behind the low representation of women in politics?
2. What are the policy measures towards improving representation in politics?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will review the literature explicated by several authors regarding women in planning and decision-making in politics. At the end of the section, the analytical framework will be constructed based on the literature.

Women in Politics

According to Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), "Everyone has the right to participate in the government of his/her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives" (United Nations, 2014). In line with this principle, Awan et al. (2017) assert that politics serves as a vital platform for empowering women, enhancing their decision-making capacity, and enabling them to effectively address societal challenges.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) also emphasize that women's participation in decision-making at all levels is a fundamental human right. In response, numerous international protocols and conventions on gender equality have been introduced to promote women's involvement in politics. However, as Mlambo and Kapingura (2019) note, these strategies have yet to achieve full implementation at the highest levels of government,

particularly in countries where cultural and institutional barriers persist.

The United Nations (2014) noted that “the relationship of women and the idea of power cannot be easy,” highlighting the complexity of women’s engagement in political leadership. Numerous factors influence women’s political representation, including the level of socio-economic development, geographic context, cultural norms, and the nature of the political system (Alzuabi, 2016; Shvedova, 2005, as cited in Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019). The underrepresentation of women in politics is not uniform across countries; rather, it is shaped by each nation’s historical, economic, social, and cultural context (United Nations, 2014). In many countries, politics remains a male-dominated sphere, with institutional conditions and political environments that are often unwelcoming or even hostile to women’s participation (Shvedova, 2005, as cited in Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019).

Legal structure

“A country's constitution must guarantee equal human rights for women, including civil, political, and electoral rights” (United Nations, 2014). Legally, women are not prohibited from participating in politics or decision-making processes in most countries. However, many nations lack clear, transparent, and inclusive electoral laws that actively promote women’s political representation (United Nations, 2014).

In practice, electoral systems often present structural barriers, such as high monetary deposits and campaign costs, which disproportionately disadvantage women due to limited access to financial resources. Although constitutional provisions and international declarations emphasize gender equality, Sri Lanka continues to have one of the lowest levels of female political representation. This is largely due to the reluctance of political parties to nominate women candidates and the absence of mechanisms to ensure gender balance in party lists (Asian Development Bank, 2015).

Social and Gender Norms

Several structural and socio-cultural barriers continue to hinder women's participation in politics. These include the lack of prioritization of political engagement among women, unfavorable legal frameworks that reinforce male-dominated political cultures, limited family support, insufficient financial resources, late-hour meetings, informal and exclusive decision-making processes, and, in some cases, acts of political violence (Orisadare, 2019).

Similarly, the United Nations (2014) identifies critical factors such as economic disparities, lack of personal security and freedom, family obligations, and internalized social norms that shape women’s attitudes toward political involvement. These challenges are deeply embedded and are often interdependent, requiring more than surface-level interventions. They point to a systemic gap between formal gender equality and meaningful political empowerment.

In the Sri Lankan context, social and cultural norms exert a particularly strong influence, especially regarding women's roles in the workforce and public life. As Perera (2015) highlights, many women exit the labor force after marriage or childbirth due to rigid workplace structures and family expectations. These same cultural pressures extend into politics, where traditional gender roles discourage women from pursuing leadership. Deeply ingrained stereotypes about women’s “proper” place in society create hesitation both among potential female candidates and within political parties themselves.

As a result, the underrepresentation of women limits the diversity of perspectives in policymaking and governance, restricting the female voice at both the executive and legislative levels. Without meaningful political participation, the broader goals of gender equity and inclusive development remain out of reach.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design, based on a comprehensive review of relevant literature. Sources included the Constitution of Sri

Lanka; peer-reviewed articles retrieved from Google Scholar, Scopus, JSTOR and Science Direct; and the statistical data published between 2015 and 2024 by the World Bank; Asian Development Bank; PARLINE database, World Economic Forum, UNESCO and the Department of Census and Statistics. A thematic analysis was undertaken to identify recurrent concepts and patterns across the selected sources. This approach enhanced the credibility and analytical depth of the study, supporting the development of evidence-based insights discussed in the subsequent sections.

4. DISCUSSION

This section will analyze the main reasons that hinder women’s active engagement in leadership and decision-making in politics in Sri Lanka, under the variables identified through the literature review.

Sri Lanka is a South Asian country characterized by a rich tapestry of ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. Women make up approximately 52% of the total population, reflecting a steady demographic shift marked by a gradual decline in the male population and an increase in the female population over recent decades (World Bank, 2019). Despite this demographic majority, women’s status in terms of equality and empowerment has not followed a corresponding upward trend. Notably, Sri Lanka ranked 13th in the Global Gender Gap Index (GGI) in 2006 but experienced a dramatic decline to 116th place out of 153 countries by 2021, marking it as the country with the largest drop in ranking (World Economic Forum, 2021). This decline signals a widening gender gap, particularly in political empowerment and economic participation. The GGI ranking in 2021 reflects Sri Lanka’s performance across four equally weighted sub-indexes: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment.

The 2021 Global Gender Gap Index for Sri Lanka is broken down into four equally weighted sub-indexes, which illustrate specific areas of gender disparity (World Economic Forum, 2021):

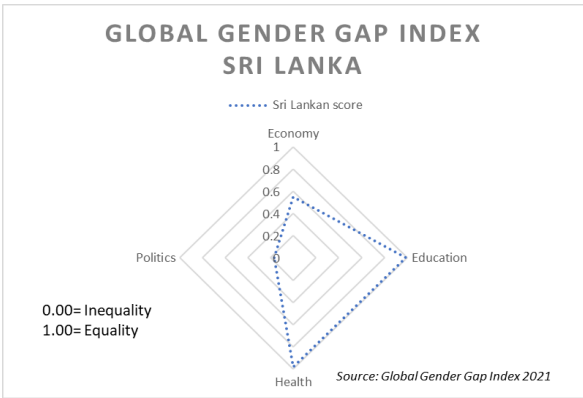


Figure 1: Global Gender Index in Sri Lanka

The main research problem in this study is highlighted in the widening gender gap in politics compared to health and education. Under the political aspect, the number of female politicians in the National Parliament, the number of women at the ministerial level, and the number of years with the female head of state are the main dimensions (World Economic Forum, 2021). The following sections will explore the principal factors influencing women’s participation in decision-making and leadership roles, with a particular focus on the Sri Lankan context.

Analytical Framework

This study will have a analytical framework associated with two variables which has an influence to the level of female participation in leadership and decision-making. These factors are identified as the role of legal structure and influence of culture as indicated in Figure 2 below:

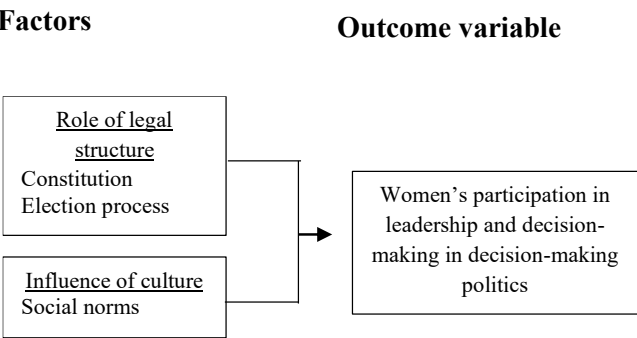


Figure 2: The factors identified for the lower participation of women in politics

According to the statistics of Women in National Parliament (2019), Sri Lanka is remarked as one of the worst ranking countries with the representation of women as ministers in national parliament (**Union, 2019**). But the country had a great political vision with the effective participation of women in parliament in the past. For example, the world's first female Prime Minister in 1960 and the country's first female executive President in 1994 of Sri Lanka were elected indicating gender balance in the decision-making at the political level. But these women came from political families as elites and they mainly represented their husband's and father's political will (Jayawardena and Kodikara, 2003 cited by Kodikara, 2009). At present, Sri Lanka's female political leaders represent only 12 lower-level seats out of 225 seats in parliament and ranked in 182nd place in Women in the National Parliament in 2019 (PARLINE database, 2019).

Unfortunately, Sri Lanka has no proper mechanism in higher education to promote political participation for both genders. The relative education model explains that a person's involvement in politics depends not on their level of education but on their high social status and social networks (Delamatta O'Keef, 2015). Consistent with this model, many politicians in Sri Lanka do not possess strong educational backgrounds but benefit significantly from extensive social connections. Consequently, celebrities, sports personalities, and other public figures often enter politics by leveraging their elevated social status and popularity. According to Kodikara (2009), a suitable political candidate should ideally possess leadership qualities, educational qualifications, financial stability, community involvement, loyalty, and an appropriate family background. However, in Sri Lanka, political party patronage is predominantly extended to male candidates, as party perceptions often stem from a belief that women are less suited to pursue a career in politics.

In line with this reality, women in Sri Lanka are generally underrepresented in student councils and political activities within schools and universities. Several entrenched issues—such as fear of harassment or violence, concern for family safety, lack of transparency in political processes, fear of

public scrutiny, and pervasive socio-cultural, structural, and informational barriers—discourage female political engagement from an early age (Maguire, 2018). As a result, unless connected to a political lineage (as a wife, widow, or daughter of a politician), women without sufficient financial backing or social connections are systematically excluded from political participation (Kodikara, 2009). Even in contexts where women have access to education and employment, Mlambo and Kapingura (2019) found that cultural restrictions within society continue to obstruct their full political participation.

Influence of legal structure on political participation

The legal framework of a country plays a critical role in empowering marginalized communities by offering them rights and opportunities. In Sri Lanka, Article 12 of the Constitution includes a special provision aimed at promoting substantive equality through laws, regulations, or administrative actions for the advancement of women. However, scholars have pointed out that the effectiveness of such provisions largely depends on the political will of those in power. As Kodikara (2008) critically observed, the practical implementation and enforcement of these legal safeguards are often influenced by the priorities and interests of the prevailing political leadership, limiting their potential impact. As the designated institution responsible for promoting equal and balanced gender participation in Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs was established with the mandate to formulate development policies addressing issues affecting women (Razavi & Miller, 1995). However, according to the ministry's performance reports, while efforts have been made in areas such as health, education, rural development, and gender-based violence, there remains a notable gap in initiatives aimed at enhancing women's participation in decision-making processes. The absence of specific programmes or policies to foster women's political and leadership involvement highlights a critical shortcoming in the ministry's strategic focus.

Though the universal franchise (right to vote) was introduced to Sri Lanka almost eight decades ago in 1931, the number of female representatives of

national parliament and local councils is abysmally low which has never been exceeded 6% (Bank, 1999). Since Sri Lankan political culture embedded with a male-controlled system, political parties do not sensitive to gender issues. The national action plan of women in 1996, formulated by the Ministry of women's affairs, identified issues and discussed remedies (Kodikara, 2008), Sri Lankan female political rights were indicated in the Women's Charter developed in 1993, and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of Sri Lanka was recognized by articles 7 and 8 about "*appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women's political and public life of the country*" (Leyton, 2006, P.20).

According to legislative reforms introduced in 2016 and 2017, the Sri Lankan government implemented a "two-pronged quota system" aimed at increasing female political representation. This included a mandatory 25% reserved seat quota for women, introduced through the Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Act No. 1 of 2016, which also mandated that one-third of the nominated candidates be women (Vijayarasa, 2020). As noted by Vijayarasa, quota systems are designed not only to ensure women's equal participation alongside men but also to serve a symbolic function by incorporating women's perspectives into politics, providing female role models, and promoting their leadership potential. Despite these intentions, the implementation faced challenges, particularly at the local level, where structural and cultural obstacles limited its effectiveness (Kanold, 2020). Furthermore, the quota system was applied exclusively to local government elections and has not yet been extended to the provincial or national levels of governance.

The countries including Australia and Germany adopted Proportional Representation (PR), which means the seats of parliament should be proportional to the number of votes, to promote women's political representation (Kodikara, 2009). In Sri Lanka, the PR system was introduced by the 1978 constitution, and the existing system is district-based and arranged with the national list (Vollan & Ganeshathasan, 2017). The drawbacks of the PR system continued to exist due to unstable political culture, discretionary power

violation in the use of the presidency, and corruption in the political system (Ragunadan, 2015). Further, the execution of PR system increased the minority representation in certain districts but had no impact on female representation in politics (Kodikara, 2009). The author evidenced that PR system has enhanced certain disadvantages for women, including an increase in violence at election time, massive spending on election campaigns, and absence of support from own party and family.

In comparison, countries such as Rwanda and Bolivia have demonstrated that institutional reforms, such as gender quotas and inclusive party practices, can significantly improve women's political representation (Kumar, 2016). For instance, Rwanda ranks among the top globally, with women making up over 60% of its national legislature, largely due to its constitutionally mandated gender quota.

Sri Lanka, despite its early history of producing the world's first female prime minister, has not sustained a strong trajectory in promoting women's political empowerment. The underrepresentation of minority women, particularly Tamil and Muslim women. Addressing these disparities requires a multifaceted approach that goes beyond legal guarantees, focussing instead on political will, party reform, civic education, and cultural transformation.

In this regard, women often face significant challenges in competing with male candidates within political parties, while voters also tend to overlook female candidates in elections. Although Sri Lanka's legal framework includes certain provisions aimed at promoting women's political representation, these measures have not translated into tangible political empowerment. As a result, female political participation has remained largely stagnant for over six decades since the country gained independence (Kodikara, 2009). Party organizers frequently exercise what is described as "unrestricted discretionary power" in nominating candidates, reinforcing the entrenched political culture known as the "Syndrome of Widows, Wives, and Daughters"—a tradition where women primarily enter politics through familial ties (Vijayarasa, 2020). Consequently, this male-dominated and traditional

political environment has marginalized the female voice, as illustrated in the following figure that highlights the underrepresentation of women in Sri Lanka’s political decision-making positions.

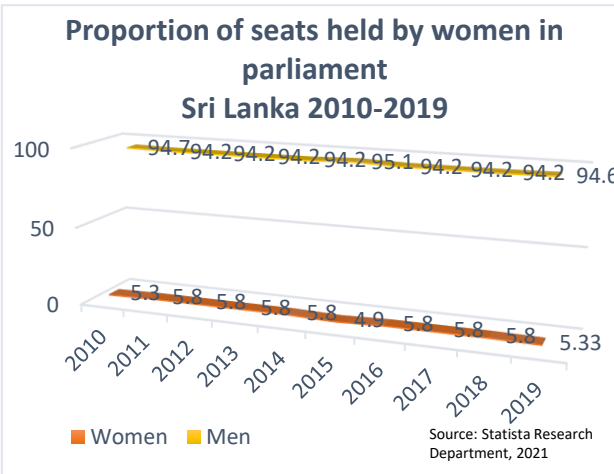


Figure 3: Proportion of seats held by women in parliament in Sri Lanka

The following figure illustrates the visual representation of gender imbalance in key political positions in Sri Lanka. It highlights the underrepresentation of women, especially at the national and ministerial levels, despite improvements through local government quotas (IFES, 2022; Muragala.lk, 2021).

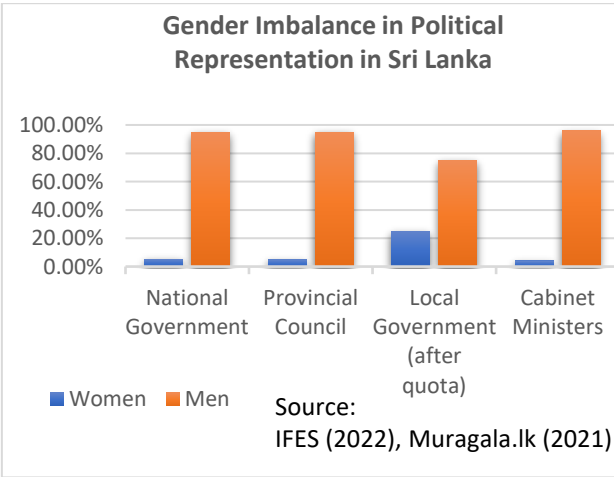


Figure 4: Gender Imbalance in Political Representation in Sri Lanka

Influence of culture towards political participation

Many years of internal conflicts in Sri Lanka resulted in the negligence of female human rights. The country’s tradition, patriarchal structures, and unsettled internal and external conflicts have restricted women’s active engagement in politics and decision-making positions (Leyton, 2006). The sub-factors under the culture, the social norms, and the glass ceiling effect in Sri Lanka will be explained in the following section.

Influence of social norms

Some feminist theories on masculine culture highlight the dominance of men within political institutions and discourse (UN Women, 2005). In broader society, female political participation is often discouraged through widely accepted stereotypes and derogatory slogans such as “from the kitchen to parliament,” “women’s participation is not a priority,” and “women are not capable of leadership roles” (Vijayarasa, 2020, pp. 24, 27). In the Sri Lankan context, women in politics face multiple layers of societal resistance. Priyanwada (2016) categorizes these challenges into three interconnected levels: at the personal level, socio-cultural expectations, psychological barriers, and economic limitations deter women from entering politics; at the political party level, women are frequently marginalized during candidate selection processes; and at the electorate level, gender bias among voters results in a lack of support for female candidates.

The slow progress in the number of female politicians elected to Parliament in Sri Lanka is largely attributed to the lack of time women can dedicate to political engagement. This is because, within the Sri Lankan context, political careers are culturally perceived as full-time, indefinite commitments that demand attention throughout the day (Sahu & Yadav, 2018). The authors further argue that women’s limited exposure to political socialization weakens voter interest in female candidates and perpetuates their marginalization within male-dominated political parties. Moreover, from an early age within both households and schools, females are not encouraged

to pursue political careers, due to prevailing societal beliefs that politics is inappropriate for women and may undermine traditional feminine ideals.

According to the prevailing political culture in Sri Lanka, political parties are predominantly organized around male-centric norms and values, including late-night meetings, informal decision-making processes, a culture of drinking and gambling, and male-dominated work practices (Kodikara, 2009). These conditions create an unwelcoming environment for women and significantly discourage them from pursuing politics as a viable career path. Consequently, there is minimal institutional commitment to promoting female political leadership. Simultaneously, societal expectations and cultural conditioning from childhood often lead women to exclude politics from their career aspirations.

Policy Recommendations and Conclusion

The preceding section examined the underlying causes and structural barriers contributing to the underrepresentation of women in political and decision-making positions in Sri Lanka. Building upon that analysis, this section outlines a set of flexible and context-specific policy recommendations aimed at addressing these challenges and fostering a more inclusive and gender-equitable political environment.

According to the results and discussion of the study, Sri Lankan politics remains predominantly male-oriented, both at the national parliamentary level and within the broader political landscape. To enhance women's representation in politics, particularly in Parliament, it is essential to reform the existing quota system and the proportional representation (PR) system, both of which currently suffer from structural and operational weaknesses. One effective strategy could be the introduction of a youth quota system within electoral laws, which would not only encourage younger generations to participate in governance but also offer long-term benefits for gender inclusivity in politics (Aggio, 2001). Furthermore, to address the limitations of the current PR system, the government could adopt a mixed electoral system, which combines the strengths of the

plurality (first-past-the-post) system with proportional representation, thereby improving both representational equity and accountability (Curtin, 2003). These reforms would collectively foster a more inclusive and balanced political environment that supports the sustained participation of women in leadership roles.

A significant barrier to women's active engagement in decision-making processes is the lack of self-confidence, which often stems from longstanding socio-cultural conditioning. To address this, the government, in collaboration with grassroots political institutions, should implement targeted training and capacity-building programs aimed at strengthening women's political leadership and self-efficacy (Kodikara, 2009). Moreover, the development and enforcement of gender-sensitive policies are essential to cultivating a supportive political environment for women who aspire to participate in governance and leadership (Sahu & Yadav, 2018). In particular, rural women who are frequently marginalized, illiterate, and constrained by traditional norms and customs must be prioritized in these efforts (Sahu & Yadav, 2018). For this demographic, community-based organizations should play a proactive role in promoting localized capacity-building initiatives that amplify women's voices and foster early-stage political participation at the grassroots level. Such platforms are instrumental in creating pathways for broader political engagement and empowerment (Joseph & Shandralingam, 2018).

Another critical barrier to women's political representation is the lack of financial resources required to conduct effective election campaigns. This financial constraint disproportionately affects female candidates, making it one of the most significant challenges to their political engagement. As a potential remedy, the government could consider providing direct financial support to female candidates (Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019). In this regard, Kodikara (2009) recommends establishing a dedicated political fund similar to initiatives such as EMILY's List (Early Money Is Like Yeast), which supports pro-democratic women candidates in the United States by mobilizing early financial contributions, and the WISH List (Women in the Senate and House), which raises funds, offers

training, and provides strategic support to increase the number of female political leaders. Additionally, implementing legal reforms to promote transparency in campaign financing is essential. Such reforms could include regulating funding sources, introducing spending limits for election campaigns, and ensuring accountability in financial practices at the political party level (Vollan & Ganeshathasan, 2017).

Similarly, the lack of transparency and accountability in the nomination process remains a persistent issue in Sri Lankan politics. To address this challenge, the government should introduce gender-sensitive rules and procedures within political parties, reform the legislative framework to address deep-rooted cultural and societal barriers, and increase the proportion of female representation in parliament (UNDP, 2016). Another key obstacle is the absence of visible female role models in politics, which discourages women from aspiring to leadership positions. Therefore, identifying and promoting successful female political leaders can serve to inspire and empower future generations of women to engage in political activism (Kodikara, 2009). Furthermore, mobilizing and encouraging female voters is essential, particularly given that Sri Lanka has historically demonstrated a significantly high turnout of female voters (Kodikara, 2009).

The persistent underrepresentation of women in political leadership in Sri Lanka necessitates a comprehensive and multidimensional policy response that addresses both structural and socio-cultural barriers. It is imperative that the government and relevant institutions implement robust gender quota systems at the national level, reform electoral financing mechanisms to ensure equitable access for female candidates, and enhance accountability and transparency within political party structures. Furthermore, sustained efforts to raise public awareness and systematically challenge entrenched cultural norms are essential to fostering a more inclusive and gender-equitable political environment.

As a summary, the first attempt of this study is to identify the main reasons that hinder women's voice and appearance in the decision-making platform in the politics in Sri Lanka. As a second attempt,

suitable policy implications were suggested. The study has been discussed certain factors which are identified by the literature review, to determine the level of women's participation in the politics, such as the role of legal structure and influence culture. According to the first factor, the study identified that the Sri Lankan legal structure also has not yet been reached to ensure gender diversity and equal participation in decision-making positions. Thirdly and mainly, the study discussed the factors that are influencing women's absence of active participation in Sri Lankan culture which is mainly dominated by man-oriented social norms, values, and beliefs.

5. REFERENCES

- ADB (Asian Development Bank) (1999) *Country briefing paper: Women in Sri Lanka*. Asian Development Bank, Programs Department West. ISBN 971-561-216-4.
- ADB (Asian Development Bank) (2015) *Country gender assessment: Sri Lanka*. Asian Development Bank. ISBN 978-92-9257-024-8 (Print), 978-92-9257-025-5 (e-ISBN).
- Affairs, Ministry of Women and Child Affairs (2017) *The performance report of the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs*. Ministry of Women and Child Affairs.
- Aggio, C. (2001) 'Lady leaders': *The case of quotas for women's representation in Argentina*. Inter-American Development Bank.
- Araneda-Guirriman, C., Sepúlveda-Páez, G., Pedraja-Rejas, L. & Martín, J.S. (2023) 'Women in academia: an analysis through a scoping review', *Frontiers in Education*, 8.
- Awan, N. & Khan, N. (2017) 'Critical review on past literature of women decision participation in income generating activities in the world', *International Journal of Advanced Research and Publications*, pp. 251–256. ISSN 2456-9992.
- Curtin, J. (2003) 'Women and proportional representation in Australia and New Zealand', *Policy*

and Society, 22(1), pp. 48–68. DOI: 10.1016/S1449-4035(03)70013-7.

Delamatta, L. & O’Keef, A.M. (2015) *Discrimination stops here: How education affects gender political equality across democratic nations*. Semantic Scholar.

Department of Statistics Sri Lanka (2021) *Proportion of seats held by women in parliament Sri Lanka 2010–2019*. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/730591/sri-lanka-proportion-of-seats-held-by-women-in-national-parliament/>.

Forum, World Economic (2021) *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*. World Economic Forum. ISBN 978-2-940631-07-0.

Forum, World Economic (2024) *Global Gender Gap Report 2024*. World Economic Forum. ISBN 978-2-940631-89-6.

Goetz, A.M. (2003) *Women’s education and political participation – Education for All Global Monitoring Report*. UNESCO.

IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems) (2022) *Women’s Political Representation in Sri Lanka: Electoral System Analysis and Recommendations*. Available at: <https://www.ifes.org/publications/womens-political-representation-sri-lanka-electoral-system-analysis> (Accessed: 15.7.2025).

International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2022) *Women’s political representation in Sri Lanka: Electoral system analysis and recommendations*. United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Joseph, F.M. & Shandralingam, K. (2018) *Enhancing northern Sri Lankan women’s political participation in post-conflict context: A review of literature and analysis*. Jaffna.

Kanold, E. (2020) *A field study of Sri Lankan women’s struggle for equal political representation and influence*. Department of Government, Uppsala University.

Kodikara, C. (2008) *The national machinery for the protection and promotion of women’s rights in Sri Lanka*. WLUML Dossier.

Kodikara, C. (2009) *The struggle for equal political representation of women in Sri Lanka*. Ministry of Child Development and Women’s Empowerment & UNDP.

Kumar, R. (2016) *These three countries significantly increased women parliamentarians*. Available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/governance/these-three-countries-significantly-increased-women-parliamentarians>.

Lanka, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri (2020) *The Constitution of Sri Lanka: Chapter 3, Article 12 (as amended up to 29 October 2020)*. Parliament Secretariat.

Lawless, J.L. & Fox, R.L. (2013) *Girls just wanna not run: The gender gap in young Americans’ political ambition*. School of Public Affairs, Washington.

Leyton, B.V. (2006) *Women’s human rights: Issues of implementation in Sri Lanka*. Department of Behavioural, Social and Legal Sciences, Örebro University.

Maguire, S. (2018) *Barriers to women entering parliament and local government*. Institute for Policy Research, University of Bath.

Malloriebowling (2024) *Women in leadership: Current statistics and future outlook*. Empowering Women in Industry. Available at: <https://www.empoweringwomeninindustry.com/post/women-in-leadership-current-statistics-and-future-outlook>.

Mlambo, C. & Kapingura, F. (2019) ‘Factors influencing women political participation: The case of the SADC region’, *Cogent Social Sciences*, 5(1), 1681048. DOI: 10.1080/23311886.2019.1681048.

Muragala.lk (2021) *Report on women’s political representation through the 25 percent local government quota in Sri Lanka*. Available at: <https://muragala.lk/articles/report-on-womens->

political-representation-through-25-percent-lg-quota-in-sri-lanka.

Nations, United (2014) *Political empowerment of women: Framework for strategic action*. Americas and the Caribbean Regional Office.

Nations, United (2020) *Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*. Available at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>.

electHER Now (2021) *Politics is a potent way to empower women – Preneet Kaur (Facebook)*. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/electHERNow/posts/politics-is-a-potent-way-to-empower-women-preneet-kaur-with-a-federal-election-on/242664521101022/>.

OECD (2020) *Policies and practices to promote women in leadership roles in the private sector*. OECD.

Orisadare, M.A. (2019) 'An assessment of the role of women groups in women political participation and economic development in Nigeria', *Frontiers in Sociology*, 4, Article 52. DOI: 10.3389/fsoc.2019.00052.

PARLINE Database (2019) *Women in national parliaments*. Available at: <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>.

Perera, C. (2015) *Sri Lankan women in politics*. Available at: <https://www.lk.undp.org/content/srilanka/en/home/Blog/2015/12/11/Sri-Lankan-Women-in-Politics.html>.

Priyanwada, G.M. (2016) *Women's status in Sri Lankan administrative service: A special reference to Galle district*. Available at: <http://www.northsouth.edu>.

Ragunadan, K. (2015) *The impact of the proportional representation system on presidential powers in Sri Lanka*. University of Kelaniya.

Rathnayake, R. (2024) *An assessment of women's representation in planning and decision-making at the executive level*. 17th International Research

Conference, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka.

Rathnayake, R. & Jayasinghe, R. (2024) 'Educating the mind: Buddhist spiritual practices in schools – Policy options for Sri Lankan context', *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 8(7), pp. 89–99.

Razavi, S. & Miller, C. (1995) *From WID to GAD: Conceptual shifts in the women and development discourse*. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development & UNDP.

Sahu, T.K. & Yadav, K. (2018) 'Women's education and political participation', *International Journal of Advanced Education and Research*, 3(6), pp. 65–71. DOI: 10.22271/educatin.2018.v3.i6.15.

UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) (2016) *Strengthening women's political participation: An analysis of women's parliamentary networks in Europe and Central Asia*. UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub.

UNESCO (2020) *Promise of gender equality: Key action 2018–2019*. UNESCO, Paris.

UNICEF (2019) *UNICEF data – Literacy*. Available at: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/literacy/>.

Union, Inter-Parliamentary (2019) *Women in national parliaments*. Available at: <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>.

Vijayarasa, R. (2020) 'Women's absence in Sri Lankan politics: Lessons on the effectiveness and limitations of quotas', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 81, 102371. DOI: 10.1016/j.wsif.2020.102371.

Vollan, K. & Ganeshathasan, L. (2017) *A system of electoral representation for Sri Lanka*. CPA Working Papers on Constitutional Reform No. 16. Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Women, UN (2021) *Women in Politics 2021*. Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Women, UN (2024) *Women political leaders 2024*. United Nations.

UN Division for the Advancement of Women (UN DAW) (2005) *Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes with particular emphasis on political participation and leadership*. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

World Bank (World Development Indicators) (2019) *The World Bank (IBRD–IDA) – Female population (% total)*. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=LK>.