

Sexism in Politics: A Women Specific Barriers Hindering Women Representation in Local Government Electoral Seats in Tanzania, a Case of Dar Es Salaam City Council

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.91200109>

Received: 11 December 2025; Accepted: 18 December 2025; Published: 01 January 2026

ABSTRACT

The study examined women-specific barriers hindering women's representation in Local government electoral seats in Tanzania focusing on Dar es Salaam City Council (DCC). The study involved a sample of 174 respondents selected using strata-random and purposive sampling techniques. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics through SPSS and results presented in frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data were analyzed using themes and results are presented through narration and using quotes from interviews and FGDs. The findings show that the women-specific barriers which include; inadequate awareness, lack of time and readiness for political activities, insufficient education. The study concluded that women specific barriers have become prevalent in the path to women progress to political and representation positions. The barriers have brought negative repercussion to both women and the society as a whole in various social and economic arenas. Furthermore, the study suggests potential areas for future gender focused research studies on social, economic, and cultural barriers costarring effective women representation in local government electoral seats.

Key words: Women representation, Gender equality, electoral seats, Gender equity and women under-representation

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Globally, gender composition of local government bodies varies both within and across countries and regions (Ako & Campion, 2023). For instance, the United Nations (UN, 2020) shows that, out of 6.02 million local government electoral members globally, only 2.18 million were women, which is equivalent to 36% of the electoral members in local deliberative seats (UN Women, 2021). The same report shows that, in Developed Countries (DC), the proportion of women in electoral seats in local government in the United States of America (USA) was 28.1%; while in the United Kingdom (UK) women comprise of 31.6% of local government seats (Sinpeng & Savirani, 2022). In the European Union (EU) the proportion of women representatives local government bodies has increased from 23.4% in 2008 to 29% in 2019 (UN Women, 2022). In the Asian and Pacific regions, the statistics show that, the percentage of women in local government electoral seats almost 33% (*Ibid.*).

In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries, studies reveal that women representation in local government is still a serious problem despite the significant achievements in some countries (Chisika & Yeom, 2023; Ugwu & Ekeke, 2021; Chouchou, 2022). Overall, Sub-Saharan Africa has only 29 per cent of women representatives in the local government, despite the dedicated implementation of the gender quota system (IPU, 2021). However, the level of women's representation in local government electoral seats and leaderships in Africa varies both within and across countries. For instance, a study by UN Women (2023) indicates that Tunisia has 48.5 percent of women's representation in local government electoral seats and it is ranked at the top in Africa and 4th globally. It is followed by Senegal with 47.2 percent and is ranked 8th globally. Tanzania is ranked 54th globally with only 30.7 percent of women in electoral seats at local governments decision making bodies (IPU, 2022). Studies indicate that in the region, women under-representation trends in local government electoral seats is attributed to multiple factors such as unfavorable culture, social norms, patriarchal system and lack of support (Anyango, Alupo & Opoku, 2018; Mumo & Kagiri, 2018).

At national level, women representation in government decision-making bodies in Tanzania through electoral seats can be traced back to 1961 when it attained its political independence. From that time, women were active in politics, vying for various elected leadership positions, notably representative roles in elected seats. Initially, during that time, a significant number of women that engaged in politics by mobilizing resources mainly causing people to join the ruling party to strengthen the party's membership. One notable prominent woman who championed that was Bibi Titi Mohamed, who played a greater role in the pre-and post-independence period (Kairuki, 2015).

The Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania (URT) of 1977, Article 21 (2), stipulates that every citizen has the right and freedom to participate fully in the process of decision-making regarding the society and the nation as a whole. In the case of participation in electoral seats, the Constitution as amended in 1992 provides a benchmark of 15 percent of the constituencies for women. In addition, there are other acts such as Local Government (Elections) Act, 2019, Section 86A (8), Chapter 292 (for Councilors' Election), that provide for a quota system that facilitates special seats for women. The Act calls for the implementation of one-third of women's special seats of councilors (George et al., 2020). Further reforms were made when the government made the 13th constitutional amendment to promote the women's political empowerment in line with the Beijing Declaration (1995) and the SADC Declaration of 1997 (Meena *et al.*, 2017).

Thus, despite the legal framework and policies enacted to enhance and promote women's involvement in decision-making bodies, women's representation in local government is still a challenge (Mtasingwa, 2022). Moreover, the initiatives and efforts in political parties (including the ruling and opposition parties) have helped to sensitise issues of women, hence increased attention. In the spectrum of political parties, women's issues have gained important considerations, with greater support calling for increased roles of women in political activities reverberating all over political regimes. Local government legislation, such as local government (urban authorities) Act of 1982, calls for women's involvement in politics and representation in decision-making bodies. Furthermore, international commitments such as inclusive governance, women's empowerment and political participation, and gender equality have made the issues of women more popular and gained wider support. Understanding the barriers to women's representation in local government decision-making bodies is crucial, as it may help in addressing the challenges, hence motivating the need for a study.

Statement Of The Problem

The representation of women in local government (LG) electoral bodies is imperative for the attainment of gender equality and inclusive governance. Despite the implementation of various strategies aimed at increasing women's representation in electoral seats in the LG, women's under-representation remains a challenge. Women's level of representation in elected leadership positions and electoral bodies as well as in local government electoral seats has remained a societal concern. The level results from nomination by political parties, electoral body, political environment, and legal and policy framework (Meena et al., 2017). The creation of Special Seats (SS) has shown little improvement, as it has not yet helped the government to achieve gender equality in LG decision-making bodies. The LG election outcomes are evidence of the gender inequality in LG electoral seats, which drives the need to investigate the drivers for the problem.

Previous studies indicate that women's political efforts towards representative and decision-making bodies have been affected by various barriers ranging from social, cultural and institutional barriers (Meena et al., 2017 and Faria, 2021). However, most studies focused on the general decision-making, particularly the parliament, with only a few studies focused on local government councils (Meena et al., 2017; Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2016; Delgado, 2019; Faria, 2021). Some studies, such as the study by Mtasingwa (2022), highlighted issues in the local government context, making the gravity of the problem not adequately understood. Aspirants in local government decision-making bodies, particularly wards and street councils, face increased challenges in their bid for leadership positions. To understand the barriers to women's representation in local government councils and elected leadership positions, particularly in Dar es Salaam City Council (DCC), is imperative for developing strategies to address the problem. Therefore, the study examined the barriers that impair women's representation in local government electoral seats, particularly those seeking grassroots and ward leadership positions in Dar es Salaam City Council.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted the descriptive research design to assess barriers to women's representation in local government electoral seats in Dar es Salaam City Council. This study used both probability and non-probability sampling methods obtained 174 participants. The study applied mixed model where qualitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire while qualitative data was collected through a structured interviews, focused group discussions as well as documentary reviews. Quantitative data were processed and transformed into numerical form using the software Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). Analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics techniques whereas qualitative data were coded and subjected to theme-content analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Inadequate Awareness on the Women's Right to Representation in LG

The study aimed at assessing whether inadequate awareness of the rights and importance of engaging in politics was a barrier to women's representation in local government electoral seats. Figure 4.4 presents the results.

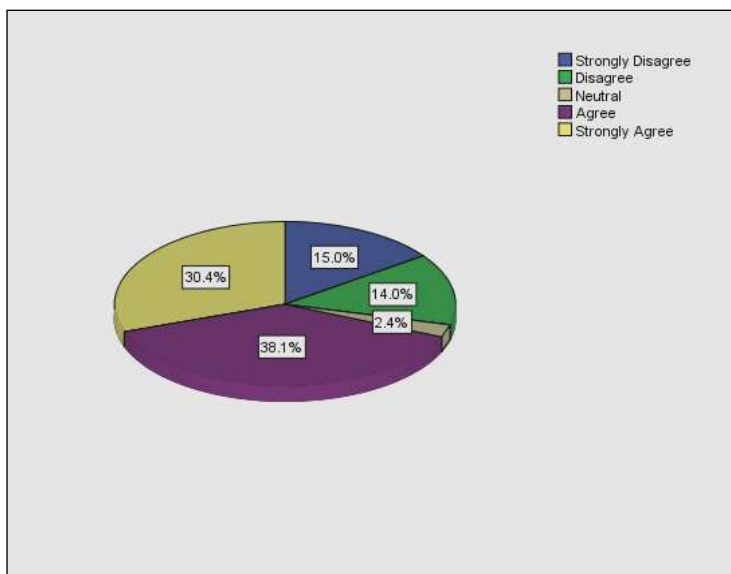


Figure 5.1: Inadequate Awareness and Engagement in Politics

Source: Field Data (2025)

The results show that two-thirds of respondents (69.0%) agreed that inadequate awareness of the right and importance of women engaging in elected positions in local government was one of the barriers to women's representation in local government electoral seats. The remaining few (31.0%) disagreed with the effects of awareness on the barrier. The results are in line with study conducted with Meena et al., (2017) indicated that inadequate awareness of the rights and importance of engaging women in governance structures is one of the barriers to the low representation and participation of women in LG electoral seats. The results suggest that members of LG decision-making bodies understand how inadequate awareness of political matters and how LG governance operate affect the level of women representation in LG elected seats. Most women have little awareness of political issues and the entire process regarding electoral seats. They lack a good understanding of matters regarding politics within political parties and how it leads to representations. This is evidence of the level at which women are involved in politics. They also see no future in politics as they consider the challenges of risking their resources in engaging in politics that is perceived as dangerous. However, the opportunities within politics are not well understood by many women who totally lose interest in politics.

Lack of Available Information on Local Government Opportunities

The study aimed at determining whether women's lack of information on local opportunities available in the

local government was responsible for low women representation in local government electoral seats. Figure 4.5 presents the results of this statement.

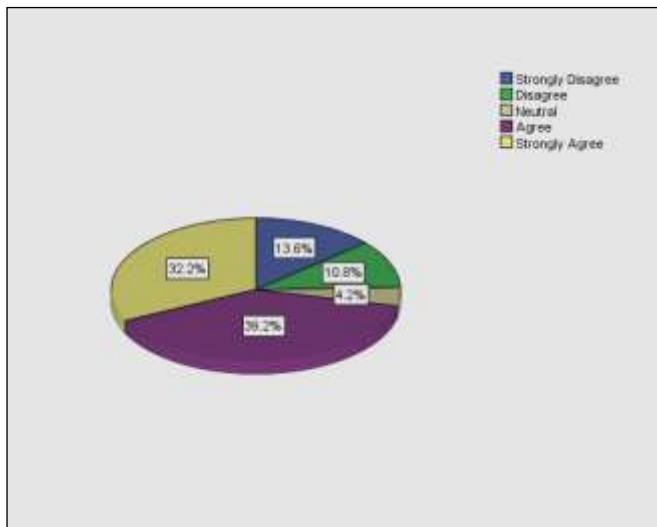


Figure 5.2: Lack of Information on LG Opportunities

Source: Field Data (2025)

The results show that two thirds of respondents (69.4%) agreed that lack of information on opportunities available in local government structures was one of the individual barriers to women's representation in local government electoral seats. Few respondents (30.6%) disagreed that lack of information was associated with the barriers. The findings are supported with Mtasingwa (2022) studies concluded that, that lack of information on LG opportunities led to the low participation of women in political activities hence low representation of the women in LG electoral seats. The information regarding politics and government opportunities are limited to those showing interests and engaging in politics. Most women in the society are not attracted to politics, making them access little or no information on the available representation for LG elected seats. Information asymmetry has denied women interests in politics. For instance, information for inviting candidates in political contest is not well-disseminated to the society. Moreover, the information also lack clarity in elaborating the opportunities, making only few women interested in political process and representation in LG elected seats.

Lack of Time and Readiness to Contest for LG Electoral Seats

Respondents were required to indicate whether lack of time and readiness to contest for local government electoral seats was another individual barrier to women's representation in local government electoral seats. Figure 4.6 presents the results on this statement.

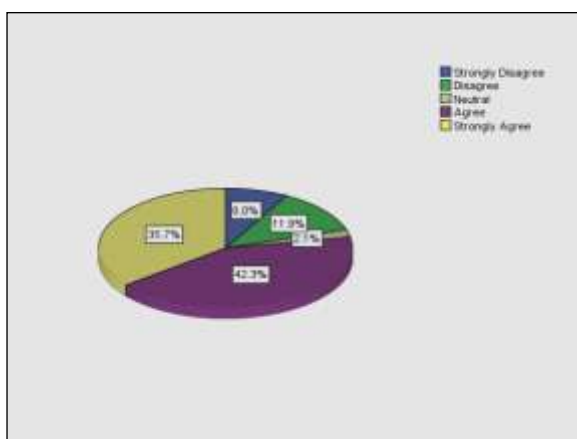


Figure 5.3: Time and Readiness for Political Activities

Source: Field Data (2025)

The results show that the majority of respondents (78.0%) agreed that lack of time and readiness to contest for local government electoral seats was a barrier to women's representation in local government electoral seats. Only a few (22.0%) respondents disagreed that lack of time and readiness was a barrier. The results suggest that members of LG decision-making bodies understand how women are preoccupied with multiple household and social tasks. Kairuki (2025) highlighted that, political activities are time-consuming; women find it difficult to engage fully in politics as they are pressed with multiple responsibilities. Inadequate time to divide between household tasks and political activities reduces their readiness to participate in politics, hence advancement to LG electoral seats. The multiple tasks revolving around women reduce their time for engaging in politics, hence giving men counterparts more leverage to dominate politics and LG electoral seats.

Insufficient Education

Respondents were asked to indicate whether insufficient education and knowledge was a barrier to women's representation in local government electoral seats. Figure 4.7 presents the results.

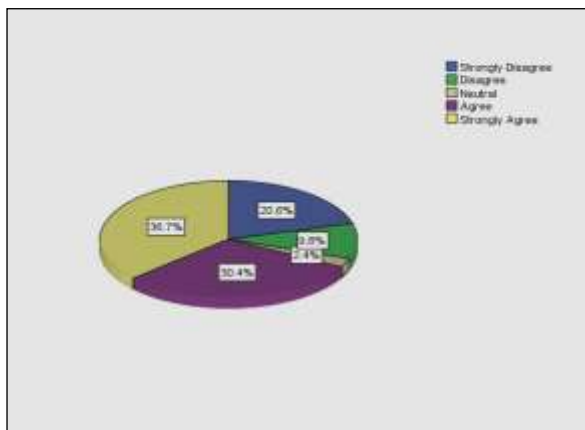


Figure 5.4: Insufficient Education and Knowledge

Source: Field Data (2025)

The results show that nearly two-thirds (67.1%) agreed that insufficient education and knowledge was a barrier to women's representation in local government electoral seats. However, some respondents (32.9%) disagreed on the effects of insufficient education and knowledge on the barrier. The study indicates that lack of sufficient education among most women led to low participation of women in political activities, hence low representation of the women in LG electoral seats. Unlike women, men are highly educated in terms of number and levels; they have opportunities to meet various qualifications for elected leadership positions. The findings are in agreement with studies conducted with Mtasingwa (2022) and Agbalajobi (2020) concluded that, potential women in LG authority lack sufficient educational qualifications for LG electoral seats as provided by particular political parties. Uneducated women have limited opportunities to be allowed to participate in election contests for LG electoral seats. Moreover, despite leadership ability and talents Lack of education also decreases confidence for contesting for elected leadership positions in LG decision-making bodies.

Likewise, the study findings from interviews indicate that there was a lack of awareness of local government functions, a lack of important information and an interest in political activities. This led to women lagging behind in seeking representatives' opportunities in local government, hence unequal representation between men and women in various decision-making bodies. The barriers have been felt at local governance representation, where during election seasons, few women show interest in contesting for electoral seats. In an interview, an interviewee from the key informants from the City Council had this to say:

In every area within the DCC, very few women seemed to be interested in political representation in Local Government. This is attributed to insufficient knowledge on political matters at Local Government and inefficient access to information regarding available opportunities in the Local Government decision-making bodies (Key informant's interview, 20 September 2025).

The results suggest that some women know little about politics and connection between engaging in politics and securing representation electoral seats in the LG. This is attributed to inadequate access to information regarding available opportunities in politics and LG decision-making bodies.

Another participant who participated in the KII was of the opinion that insufficient efforts to access information regarding government opportunities contributed to low participation of women in local government electoral seats. He demonstrated that:

“Women have been ignoring involvement in political activities due to being preoccupied with domestic activities. They cannot divide their limited time between household tasks and public issues such as serving the politics. (Key informant’s interview, 22 September 2025)”

The results suggest that insufficient attention and involvement of women in political activities due to negative perceptions of politics deny women more opportunities. Most women, particularly at the grassroots level, ignore the need to participate in political activities and leadership opportunities. They believe the positions are for men taking themselves out of political communities.

Additionally, during the FGDs, it was reported that the low number of women holding positions in local government electoral seats was primarily due to a lack of awareness about political matters among women. This lack of awareness led to low participation in political activities, ultimately resulting in the underrepresentation of women in local government electoral seats. She stated that:

“There are few women in elected positions in the Local Government due to many women not being interested in elected leadership positions at all levels including lower levels. Apart from having, little knowledge on issues regarding what it takes to participate in competitive elections with the Local Government structures. Even some well-educated women are not interested in such electoral seats due to lack of awareness on the expected output (FGD, 14 September 2025).”

The results suggest that most women have little or no interest in political activities, hence reducing their chances of LG representation in electoral seats. Due to the social and political environment that is always associated with violence and corruption, many women have seen no future in politics. This has created women-specific barriers to women’s representations in electoral seats at the LG. Thus, overall comments suggest that lack of awareness on the local level; there are many individual/personal barriers to women’s representation in elected positions in the local government.

The findings of the study show that, women are inadequately participating in political activities, which lead to under-representation in local government electoral seats. This is attributed to insufficient awareness, which barred them from being exposed to various political opportunities available in local government electoral seats in Dar es Salaam City Council. In conjunction with the findings, Lean et al. (2021) emphasised that insufficient awareness of various matters related to the politics and government offices has been retarding women’s progress towards politics and leadership opportunities. Women lack access to important information on what makes it to local government electoral seats. Some women believe they do not deserve or are not well-fitted for the political space. Some women have negative attitudes and perceptions of engagement in politics and seeking political representation. They pay little attention to political matters, as they believe they will deny them time to undertake other social and domestic responsibilities. They regard engaging in politics and government decision-making activities as challenging tasks that they cannot afford to carry out.

Women are encountering the problems of time and readiness for political activities; it is contributed to by the entire procedures of engagement in politics, nominations, contesting in elections and selections. To demonstrate this, the study by Mtasingwa (2018) noted that women’s multiple responsibilities drive them to pay little attention to political matters pertaining to representation in local government electoral bodies. Women face problems of education qualifications and capability to interact with various issues regarding local government political activities. Lack of sufficient training and exposure to knowledgeable environments were among the barriers hindering women’s effective representation in local government electoral seats. In relation to the findings, Sapkota (2018) found that access to education and lack of quality education still remain

barriers to many women seeking elected leadership positions in local government. According to Chouchou (2022), lack of access to well-developed education and training programmes for women's leadership in general has prevented women from securing leadership positions in government seats.

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