

# Women's representation in Ethiopia's political parties

## Issues of inclusion and diversity

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The discourse on women and politics has focused on increasing the participation of women in politics. While this remains critical, experiences of female political party members show that calls for increased representation mask intersecting aspects of identity that exclude certain categories of women from political party engagement and from factors that propel women into politics. The discourse should expand to examine which women are represented and to what degree women from marginalised groups are represented.

## Key findings

- ▶ Data from this study indicate the diversity of women in political parties in terms of ethnicity, region, religion, class status with respect to education and income levels, age and marital status, while also pointing to the need for more evidence generation. The discourse on women and politics among policymakers and civil society organisations (CSOs) is dominated by the narrative of increasing women's representation. It does not examine the diversity among women and the associated issues that arise from diversity.
- ▶ The intersection of various factors of identity shapes women's entry into politics and their experiences in political parties. These intersecting factors also play a role in either facilitating or obstructing women's entry into political parties.
- ▶ Policy and legal frameworks on women and electoral politics tend to assume women are a homogeneous group, thereby inadvertently maintaining oppressive power systems that privilege some women over others.

## Recommendations

- ▶ The discussion on women and politics should extend beyond increasing women's representation to examine which women are represented as well as the degree to which women from marginalised groups are represented.
- ▶ The picture emerging from the experiences of the study participants shows the need for robust evidence generation that enhances the understanding of the effects of intersections of identity among policymakers, CSOs and political parties. Educational and research institutions should take the lead in intersectional analysis in research.
- ▶ There is an urgent need to review policy and legal frameworks that depict women as homogeneous groups. In its review of the women's policy, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs should adopt an intersectional lens that recognises diversity among women. The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia reviews of electoral laws and directives should adopt an intersectional lens.
- ▶ By-laws of political parties guide the recruitment and engagement of women in politics. Reviews of these by-laws and programmes by political parties that recognise the multiple sources of disadvantage among different categories of women are thus timely.
- ▶ CSOs have the important role of advocacy in the review of policies and laws, the review of party by-laws and agenda shaping of research on women and politics.
- ▶ Women's engagement in politics requires active mobilisation. The government, CSOs and political parties engaged in mobilisation should work on increasing the diversity-consciousness of frontline actors mobilising women.

## Background

Women's rights to participate in political life are enshrined in national, regional and international legal frameworks on human rights. Political parties are considered to be the key gatekeepers if not the only means to access political power and voice for women in government decision making. Political parties are meant to be representatives of and conduits for the voices of citizens at large, including underrepresented categories like women in political decision making, both through direct participation in governance/government and through shaping politics and policies.

Political parties have an important role to play in paving the way for equitable participation by facilitating the equal participation of women, men and marginalised sections of society. Yet, for political parties to serve as vehicles for the equitable representation and participation of marginalised groups, there is a need for thorough understanding of the barriers/constraints that stand in the way of this and conscious work towards breaking these barriers.

### Statement of the problem

Politics and political representation in general are deeply patriarchal, including in the Ethiopian context. Patriarchy is a significant barrier to women's participation in public life in general and politics in particular. The discourse on women and politics has focused on creating equality of opportunities, mainly by removing barriers that impede women's entry into politics. Measures ranging from legislative actions to direct investments in women have been taken to facilitate women's entry into politics. This discourse and the accompanying policy approach have maintained the binary outlook of men versus women without necessarily examining the diversity among women and the associated issues that arise from diversity.

The discourse on women and politics has maintained the binary outlook of men versus women without examining diversity among women

The reality is that the singular lens for thinking about women and politics is inadequate. Women are diverse with a variety of needs, interests and priorities. How do we account for this diversity in women's representation in politics? This question is particularly important in the Ethiopian context where ethnic identity has been and is the organising principle of politics and political parties. What are the implications, if any, of this ethnic, identity-based politics and the formation of political parties, given the differences in social location among (women) members of a given ethnic group?



PATRIARCHY IS A SIGNIFICANT  
BARRIER TO WOMEN'S  
PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

This research, focusing on political parties, examines women's formal and substantive representation in Ethiopia's political parties from an intersectional point of view. It explores the following questions:

- What is the level of representation of women in political parties?
- What is the diversity among women within political parties in terms of factors such as religion, region, ethnicity and class? What characteristics do women members of political parties have?
- What intersecting factors contribute to women's engagement in politics through representation in political parties?
- What intersecting factors determine the exclusion of different categories of women from representation within political parties?
- What are possible approaches/mechanisms that can contribute to the holistic representation of women in political parties?

### Approach and methodology

This research examines women's representation in Ethiopia's political parties from an intersectional point of view. The analysis of women's place in politics is conducted through the prism of factors that together affect their place in society. The study started by examining the numeric representation of women in political parties. The current law around political parties requires them to provide sex-disaggregated data of members for purposes of registration. There are also requirements for the allocation of a certain percentage of leadership positions in each party to women.

Other than the above two criteria, for purposes of intersectional analysis neither the law nor the practice within political parties facilitates the capturing of different factors of identity/characteristics of members, including women. In this absence of documentary evidence, obtaining an accurate picture of the diversity of women within political parties – in terms of identity markers such as religion, ethnicity, age and class – would require survey-targeting political parties. Short of this, it is possible to get an indicative picture of the diversity of women represented in political parties through targeted qualitative approaches, as adopted by this study.

This study started with a list of identity markers to guide the sampling and selection of study participants from among registered political parties. In light of the broad topic of the study (women and politics/representation), contextually relevant factors of identity as identified in the ISS Terms of Reference (ToR) – namely religion, region, class and ethnicity – were used to examine diversity. Given the large number of political parties, the female political party members' collective known as Timret was used as the primary source for the target population for the study. The collective brings together female members of political parties registered with the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE).

After discussions with the leadership of the Timret and using the factors identified in the ToR, female members were selected/sampled from political parties (a) that fielded the highest number of female candidates;<sup>1</sup> (b) their female members were in leadership positions in Timret and/or their own political parties; and (c) rank and file members of registered political parties that were identified through snowball sampling.

### Interviews captured the lived experiences of female political party members using their own voices

In-depth interviews were carried out with a total of 14 selected female members representing five political parties. The interviews captured the lived experiences of female political party members using their own voice/narration. The initial round of interviews helped identify other factors, namely age and marital status, which served for further sample selection during the data collection.

The interview data were analysed in terms of the research questions and the themes emerging from the lived experiences narrated by the participants. The self-identified factors of identity, and the associated meanings that participants constructed out of their experience of being female political party members, were captured and analysed. The analysis provides useful insights into factors of identity that propel women into politics and political party engagement, as well as those that serve to exclude certain categories of women. Drawing from the experience of the participants, the analysis also

provides some indication into the potential of diversity of representation towards substantive representation where women's issues are raised in parties.

This study also drew on data from a review of political party programme documents.<sup>2</sup> These sources of data and analysis were supplemented with data from key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders: civil society organisations (CSOs)/feminist organisations, namely TIMRAN, Setawit and the Network of Ethiopian Women's Association (NEWA); and mandated institutions, including NEBE, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA).

## Review of literature

### Intersectionality

In literature, intersectionality in various social science fields is used in different ways, ranging from as a concept, tool and method to a theory. In this paper, intersectionality is used as an analytical strategy or tool. Collins explains 'how intersectional frameworks provide new angles of vision on social institutions, practices, social problems, and other social phenomena associated with social inequality.'<sup>3</sup> A similar formulation with respect to using intersectionality as a tool is made by Crenshaw, one of the pioneers in the study of intersectionality.<sup>4</sup>

Collins further identifies various patterns of use of intersectionality as analytical strategy. These include: expanding the focus on race, sex and class to incorporate other similar categories of analysis; and a focus on identity and how intersecting identities produce distinctive experiences for individuals and groups as well as for the rethinking of core social constructs such as work and family.<sup>5</sup>

These patterns of use of intersectionality as analytical strategy/tool have direct relevance to the research question/s of this study. They help expand the current focus on gender in the women and politics discussion to incorporate other contextually relevant categories of analysis, such as ethnicity, class, religion, region and age. This investigation examines the impact that the diversity among women has on their representation in politics.

The use of intersectionality as analytical strategy/tool lends itself to examining 'how intersecting identities as systems of power produce distinctive experiences for

different categories of individuals and groups,'<sup>6</sup> with real material effects on the ground. As noted, this study examines how intersecting identities as systems of power determine entry into and engagement in political parties, and work to exclude certain categories of women. It also examines how diversity in representation matters in terms of bringing to the agenda the interests of diverse groups of women within political parties.

This study's use of intersectionality questions the binary outlook of men versus women in the discussion on women and politics. It highlights the impact of within-group differences on substantive representation and participation, and forces an examination of gender in conjunction with other systems and structures of power. It further allows for an examination of the operations of power at both individual (female members of political parties) and institutional/organisational levels (political parties and the laws and institutions governing them).

### Politics and political parties

Writings on Ethiopian politics and political parties in particular point to ethnicity or the nationalities question as an important organising principle for politics in the country.<sup>7</sup> The historical roots of many political parties that started as ethnically based movements during the imperial period and later on during the Derg regime attest to this. Furthermore, the Ethiopian student movement that galvanised the revolution leading to the downfall of the imperial regime had the nationalities question and land rights as its two core questions.<sup>8</sup>

### Ethnicity or the nationalities question is an important organising principle for politics in the country

Those raising the nationalities question advocated for the right to self-determination. With a strong allegiance to the Marxist-Leninist ideology, the student movement pushed for a struggle based on class interest against the imperial regime.<sup>9</sup> It was the nationalities question, however, that eventually dominated the political landscape in the country, weakening the class question.<sup>10</sup>

This is evident from the flourishing of political parties organised along ethnic lines, starting with those which



had beginnings in the ethnically based insurgent groups that were fighting the Derg regime to those that are currently operating in the country.<sup>11</sup> This has meant that little to no room existed for organising along broader lines that would allow for participation by other interest groups and marginalised sections of society in the country.

The closed and repressive political system, both historically and in recent decades, has also contributed to limited imagination in the organisation of politics. The system is characterised by restrictive practices introduced over the years, including the cadre structure, the use of coercive structures of the state and vast resources amassed by the then ruling coalition of Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), along with an electoral system that accentuates the dominance of the ruling party. This has skewed the playing field in favour of the ruling party and stunted the development of opposition political parties in Ethiopia.

It has also restricted the capacity of opposition parties to have firm foundations in the society. Indeed, many opposition parties have relied largely on the charisma of their leaders rather than on their rootedness in society. These factors have also limited the incentive of political parties to develop programmatic positions on substantive issues. Instead, they have tended to mobilise support by highlighting the shortcomings and authoritarian traits of the ruling coalition. Their campaigns are more about winning the protest vote of the electorate than about votes for their policy positions. These issues have severely affected the development of a multiparty system in the country.

The closed, repressive political system, both recently and historically, has contributed to limited imagination in the organisation of politics



1993 WOMEN'S POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT PLANS ADVOCATE FOR EQUAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

These conditions ultimately resulted in resentment which boiled over to produce the protest movements that became common in 2015-2017. The prolonged protests in different parts of the country since the end of 2014 led to the peaceful change in leadership within the ruling part of EPRDF. This resulted in a change in the prime minister of the country (Abiy Ahmed replacing Hailmariam Dessalegn) in 2018, marking an important step in this process.

The changes in 2018 have led to the revision of the regulatory framework governing elections, political parties and the operation of civil societies. Elections were held in 2021<sup>12</sup> with the participation of some opposition political parties, although some major political parties boycotted the election on the grounds of the undemocratic nature of the process. Recently, in the lead up to the election and thereafter, rollbacks in freedom of the media and the overall contraction of the civic space have been noted, with the imprisonment of media people and opposition politicians.

The women and politics discussion in Ethiopia cannot escape these historical and ongoing realities. The dominance of ethnicity has relegated political organisation along other grounds, including social justice and gender equality, to secondary level. Nonetheless, literature documents the role of women in the student movement in the 1960s, whether advocating for women's cause or for the general cause of the movement, as well as the women's question as articulated within the Marxist framework in women and politics discussions of the time.<sup>13</sup> Women also played an active role in the armed struggle to overthrow the Derge regime.

The repressive political system is often raised as an obstacle to women's active engagement.<sup>14</sup> From a gender-equality perspective, the stronghold of patriarchy, which affects all aspects of women's lives in Ethiopia, especially in political culture, has further constrained women's active engagement in politics.<sup>15</sup> Recent studies show that besides a repressive political culture, political parties themselves are responsible for the low level of representation of women.<sup>16</sup> Senior party leaders, who act as gatekeepers, influence party by-laws and the overall environment, which can limit the participation of women.<sup>17</sup>

The brief review above highlights the importance of ethnicity and class interests in the organisation of political parties. The influence of patriarchy makes gender an important determining factor in political engagement. Using an intersectional lens as an analytical tool shows that gender, ethnicity and class are all relevant factors in the Ethiopian context.

### **Legal framework on electoral politics in Ethiopia**

Since female representation in politics in general and in political parties in particular is shaped by the legal and political setting that structures representation, it is necessary to look at the policy framework on women/gender equality and the legal framework on electoral politics in Ethiopia to contextualise the analysis.

The 1993 women's policy and subsequent development plans governing the sector, including the current Ten Year Development Plan for women and social affairs, all advocate for the equal participation of women in politics.<sup>18</sup> The Ten Year Development Plan has

representation as one of its strategic areas, and calls for ensuring the meaningful participation of women in political affairs and promoting the participation of women in all branches of government.

In addition to these policies, the legal framework influences the participation of women in politics. It provides for a set of rights on political participation and governs the institutional mechanisms responsible for electoral democracy. Besides the constitution as the basic law of the country, and international and regional legal frameworks which the country has ratified, other major pieces of legislation include the proclamation that established the NEBE and the Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation.

Besides the repressive culture, political parties are responsible for the under-representation of women

Article 38 of the constitution provides that every Ethiopian national, without any discrimination based on sex, has the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs directly or through freely chosen representatives, to vote, to be elected and to be a member of associations. The law establishing NEBE requires that the election of members of the NEBE ought to take into account ethnic and sex representation to the extent possible. The political parties' law provides for gender considerations in the establishment of electoral management bodies and political parties, in the selection of leadership of political parties, and in the determination of the provision of financial support for political parties.<sup>19</sup>

These laws share common features, including explicit recognition of the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of sex in all election-related processes (formal equality), as well as the adoption of positive measures in selected instances to promote female participation in electoral processes (substantive equality). These provisions follow the single-axis factor of identity, namely sex/gender, for the protection and promotion of rights to political participation. In instances where other possible factors of identity, such as ethnicity, are provided for within the legal frameworks, they

are to be considered separately rather than as factors of identity intersecting with sex/gender. This may constitute an altogether different source of marginalisation and/or privilege.

What does this mean in practical terms? A woman discriminated against on the basis of sex – for example in election to the board of NEBE – will have possible recourse through the existing laws, as will a woman discriminated against because of her ethnicity. However, a woman discriminated against or lacking access because of the intersection of her ethnic identity and sex/gender will struggle to get recourse through the existing laws. This is not a difficult scenario to imagine, as the testimonial of a female political party representative from one of the developing regional states aptly in a recent study: ‘In our region, even if women want to participate in politics, ... there is no prior experience and exposure as in other parts of the country, it is complete darkness.’<sup>20</sup>

The policies on female/gender equality and the laws on political participation share a common pitfall in Ethiopian legal and policy frameworks – that of seeing women as a homogeneous group with similar interests and needs.<sup>21</sup> Even where other factors of identity are recognised, they are not considered in conjunction with sex/gender but rather as separate issues.<sup>22</sup> This approach does not capture how different individuals or groups experience different levels of vulnerabilities due to the intersection of two or more identities and consequently fails to provide appropriate interventions.

The institutional framework, particularly the NEBE, has a broader approach in its consideration of factors of identity for social inclusion, and has identified categories of socially excluded groups, such as women, youth, people with disability and other vulnerable sections of society. This approach finds expression, for instance, in the very naming of the gender structure – Gender Equality and Social Inclusion – and its extended mandate to work on different categories of marginalised and excluded sections of the population, including women, people with disability, pastoralists and internally displaced people.

Discussions with a representative of the gender and social inclusion structure revealed that despite considering different aspects of people’s identity, NEBE’s approach is mainly to look into and address the vulnerabilities of each group.<sup>23</sup> The approach does not extend to examining how intersecting identities result in complex vulnerabilities. Such complex vulnerabilities may not be addressed by measures designed to address vulnerabilities arising from each individual identity.

According to the representative, the priority thus far and at least in the immediate future is the adequate numerical representation of women to mirror the proportion of women in society. This priority has meant that there has not been a concerted attempt to look at the diversity of women represented in political parties and in elected offices. This approach, perhaps inadvertently, essentialises and homogenises categories such as gender; views gender/sex in isolation from other interlocking categories of identity; and prioritises gender as the main category of identity.

### Gender equality policies and political participation laws both see women as a homogeneous group

CSOs that were part of the study shared the value of looking into the diversity of women in politics at large to ensure that all sections of society are represented. However, similar to NEBE, the focus in the country is generally on increasing the number of women in political parties and elected offices. The appreciation of the value of diversity has not translated into meaningful action.

Discussions with the representative of a directorate responsible for women’s empowerment at the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs revealed that there is an understanding of the multiple oppression of women arising from different sources, such as religion, educational status and region.<sup>24</sup> However, this understanding is not properly reflected in policies such as the women’s policy or in tools of the Ministry that can serve as guiding frameworks for the work of other entities in the country. The Ministry is thus not in a better position to advocate for intersectional approaches in the women and politics discussion.



## Political party documents: regulations, by-laws and party programme

Like the formulation adopted by the law, political party by-laws usually use the single-axis factor of identity (sex/gender – non-discrimination on the basis of sex) for recruitment and the proportion of women in decision-making structures. Although not all political parties adopt this principle explicitly, some are intentional in their adoption of the principle of non-discrimination, including affirmative measures to bring women into their parties and to facilitate their ascension into leadership positions.<sup>25</sup>

Discussions with women's rights organisations revealed that most political parties do not have a gender policy or strategy.<sup>26</sup> Those that do are in the beginning stages. For example, Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (EZEMA) gender policy, supported by sex-disaggregated data, outlines the status of gender inequality in the social, economic and political spheres in the country. However, the focus on gender identity as the source of discrimination leads to the marginalisation of different aspects of women's lives.

As such, a focused measure of addressing the gender power imbalance is the policy response adopted in the document. For example, with the adoption of gender and agricultural policy that focuses on women, through actions such as allocating 10% of all investments in the sector for gender equality, facilitating access to all kinds of inputs for women among others.

In limited instances, the policy recognises discrimination arising from intersecting identities. For example, the policy recognises that the intersection of gender and disability severely disadvantages females with disability in terms of access to education, quality of services once in schools, and exposure to violence.

Short of a gender policy/strategy, most political parties articulate some form of gender equality in their political programmes. A study conducted in 2020 revealed that gender equality commitments may be stand-alone objectives or fall under broader social or political aspects of the party's programme.<sup>27</sup> These programmes recognise gender inequality as the reason for the disadvantage and marginalisation of women in access to services such as health,

education and economic opportunities. Party programmes also recognise social norms like harmful traditional practices as manifestations of inequality and disadvantage for women.

These articulations in political party programmes show that while gender identity is recognised as a source of discrimination, its intersection with other forms of identity, such as ethnicity, religion or disability, is not considered. Common expressions in political party programmes which use gender identity as the basis of analysis – like the 'oppression of women', 'sex-based discrimination' and the 'marginalisation of women – tend to homogenise the experiences of differently positioned women.<sup>28</sup> Categorising women as special groups that require 'special support' confirms this observation.

Gender is a recognised source of discrimination but other forms of identity such as ethnicity are not

An interesting move away from the above formulation is the attempt in some political party programmes to categorise women in terms of their location, urban or rural. Rural women are said to be at greater disadvantage on all counts, such as access to essential services, economic opportunities and effects of harmful practices.

This formulation shows that when gender identity is combined with location, the comparatively worse-off situation of rural women is revealed, thereby highlighting the diversity among women. However, this needs to be taken further as there are many sources of diversity, as the political history of the country shows.

## Proportion and position of women in political parties

Although the current political parties' law requires political parties to provide sex-disaggregated data of members for purposes of registration, data on the proportion of female members of political parties was not readily available. Apart from women's membership of political parties, another avenue to gauge female

**Chart 1: Candidates of both House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR) and Regional Councils (RC) disaggregated by gender and region**

Region	Gender		Total
	M	F	
Addis Ababa (RC data does not exist)	175 (78.47%)	48 (21.53%)	223
Afar	309 (83.96%)	59 (16.04%)	368
Amhara	1 840 (86.14%)	296 (13.86%)	2 136
Benishangul	100 (78.12%)	28 (21.88%)	128
Dire Dawa	251 (70.90%)	103 (29.10%)	354
Gambella	434 (77.22%)	128 (22.78%)	562
Harari*			
Oromia	579 (63.90%)	327 (36.10%)	906
Sidama	599 (75.06%)	199 (24.94%)	798
Somali*			
SNNPR	1 194 (76.73%)	268 (23.27%)	1 462
<b>Total</b>	<b>5 481 (79%)</b>	<b>1 456 (21%)</b>	<b>6 937</b>

Source: NEBE website

\*Data does not exist

representation in politics is their position in the leadership structures of political parties. NEBE data provide the level of representation of women in the decision-making structures of political parties.

According to NEBE data as of May 2022, female positions in the decision-making structures of political parties, drawn from their level of representation in executive structures/committees, were as follows: of the 51 registered political parties (national and regional), 12 did not have a woman in their executive committees. The remaining 39 parties had a combined total of 65 women in their executive committees, ranging from one to six women per committee. Most parties had one or two female members.

### **Diversity among female members of political parties**

This section looks at which women are represented in political parties. Equally importantly, it also examines whether women from marginalised groups are represented.

Although NEBE records do not provide sex-disaggregated data on overall membership of political parties, other than leadership positions, the NEBE data on the list of political party candidates in the

2021 elections shows disaggregation by sex, region, educational level and disability.

Chart 1 gives some indication of the diversity of women in terms of region and ethnicity. Region refers to the place where candidates compete for election. Candidature requires a period of residence in the place where one competes, or through the candidate's birth in that place.<sup>29</sup> Although region and ethnicity may not always coincide, these provisions on candidacy, together with the ethnic organisation of political parties in the country, may serve as a proxy for ethnic identity. This is particularly so for big regions like Amhara and Oromia. However, care should be taken with respect to generalising, even in these regions.

Some candidates of political parties that are not organised along ethnic lines may not necessarily have the ethnic identity of the regions they are representing. This is further complicated in areas where different ethnic identities make up the region, such as the Southern region, Benishangul and Gambela. In these cases, regional representation does not directly tell us about ethnic identity, although there is a high probability that candidates from these regions will be from the

Chart 2: Educational level of candidates of HoPR and RC from all regions

All regions	Gender		% of females from different levels versus total female candidates	Total
	M	F		
Master's degree and above and university or college degree	3 251 (79%)	864 (21%)	59.25	4 115
University or college diploma	934 (78.75%)	252 (21.25%)	17.28	1 186
Grades 6–12	1 111 (80.27%)	273 (19.73 %)	18.72	1 384
Less than Grade 6	166 (70.63 %)	69 (29.37)	4.73	235
<b>Total</b>	<b>5 462 (78.93%)</b>	<b>1 458 (21.07%)</b>	–	<b>6 920</b>

Source: NEBE website, www.nebe.et, accessed 22 June 2022, compiled by the author

ethnic groups indigenous to each region. Regional representation may also be indicative of religion, particularly for regions like Somali and Afar, where Islam is the dominant religion, reflected in candidates' names.

The data in Chart 1 provides insights into the degree to which women from minority/marginalised groups are represented at the national level. For example, women from minority/developing regional states like, Benishangul and Gambela have over 20% representation among the list of candidates of the competing political parties. This is a better representation than Amhara region, for instance, where women candidates from the different parties accounted for a mere 13.86%.

Socio-economic status, which includes indicators such as education, income and occupation, is another predictor of political participation.<sup>30</sup> The literature posits that those with higher socio-economic status often participate more in politics, with those in lower socio-economic groups being marginalised.<sup>31</sup> In the Ethiopian context, educational status has historical importance and dates back to the student movement.

Chart 2 shows the diversity of female political party candidates for the recent election in terms of educational level. An interesting observation is the relatively high number of women with tertiary education, in particular a university or college degree (59.25%). A higher level of education

appears to privilege women. This may have the effect of excluding women with a lower educational status, particularly primary level, from becoming political party candidates.

How does education intersect with other factors like regional representation? Chart 3 shows the educational level of female candidates by region.

### Socio-economic status, represented by education, income and occupation, also influences political participation

The relatively higher level of representation of women with tertiary education as candidates still holds when the data is examined regionally. In all the regions except Benishangul, the number of women with tertiary education is higher than the number of women candidates with grade-level education. Only a very small proportion of women with grade-level education are political party candidates across the regions.

The NEBE data also shows that people with disabilities are represented. Of a total of 33 candidates with disability, 29 are male and four are female. From the total number of female candidates (1 460), the percentage share with disability is 2.5%.

In conclusion, the multi-disaggregated NEBE data on candidates, although not fully representative of the membership of political parties overall, is a useful indicator of the diversity of female members of political parties in terms of regional representation (ethnicity to an extent), social class (educational level/status) and, to some degree, religion.

The data does not allow further interrogation of the level of representation of women from marginalised sections of society in terms of intersecting factors. It also does not show other possible factors of identity that may have a bearing on female participation in political parties. Nonetheless, in-depth discussions with female political

**Chart 3: Candidate list disaggregated by gender, region and education level**

Regions	Educational level	M	F	Total	% of F
Addis Ababa	Master's degree and above and university or college degree	154	36	190	18.95
	University or college diploma	15	6	21	28.57
	Grade-level education (high school or primary)	6	6	12	50
Afar	Master's degree and above and university or college degree	123	34	157	21.65
	University or college diploma	46	10	56	17.85
	Grade-level education (high school or primary)	141	14	155	9.03
Amhara	Master's degree and above and university or college degree	123	34	157	21.65
	University or college diploma	46	10	56	17.86
	Grade-level education (high school or primary)	141	14	155	9.03
Benishangul	Master's degree and above and university or college degree	50	13	63	20.63
	University or college diploma	29	9	38	23.68
	Grade-level education (high school or primary)	22	27	49	55.10
Dire Dawa	Master's degree and above and university or college degree	162	61	223	27.35
	University or college diploma	33	25	58	43.10
	Grade-level education (high school or primary)	56	17	73	23.29
Gambella	Master's degree and above and university or college degree	261	47	308	15.25
	University or college diploma	139	59	198	29.79
	Grade-level education (high school or primary)	36	21	57	36.84
Oromia	Master's degree and above and university or college degree	396	233	629	37
	University or college diploma	51	19	70	27.14
	Grade-level education (high school or primary)	124	83	207	40.09
Sidama	Master's degree and above and university or college degree	195	101	296	34.12
	University or college diploma	134	43	177	24.29
	Grade-level education (high school or primary)	268	57	325	17.53
SNNP	Master's degree and above and university or college degree	734	160	894	17.89
	University or college diploma	200	47	247	19.02
	Grade-level education (high school or primary)	260	61	321	19.00

Source: NEBE website, [www.nebe.et](http://www.nebe.et), accessed 22 June 2022, compiled by author

party members and representatives of political parties highlighted that factors such as age and marital status impact women's political participation. These two factors were found to be important in shaping the experience of female political party members.

## Intersectional identity and experiences of female political party members

Using a qualitative approach, this study attempted to capture the intersecting identities of female political party members and the implications thereof. This section discusses the lived experiences of political party members, who narrated their journey from entry into politics and political parties, their engagement and experience after membership and, in some cases, their election into office. The views of women's organisations advocating for women's empowerment in politics, regulatory bodies such as NEBE and the women's ministry were also solicited to enrich the findings.

### Identity/identities

The discussions with female political party members started with an opportunity for them to self-identify or describe themselves. The self-identifiers often used by the participants were educational status, place of birth, region, current occupation, marital status and age. Religion and ethnic identity were seldom raised as self-identifiers. Discomfort in answering and at times taking offence to the question were observed in follow-up questions, particularly those around ethnic identity.

Women in the study that occupy leadership positions within their political parties were asked if they see any pattern of diversity among female members in their parties. A similar question was raised with female respondents that hold leadership positions in the collective Timret. The leadership of Timret shared young women, unmarried women, educated women and women with low levels of education and income status as some of the profiles of women. Respondents noted that it is a welcome development that a lot more young women are taking their place in politics through membership in political parties.

Female political party members made no reference to other factors of diversity such as ethnicity, religion and disability. However, CSO representatives that work closely with female members of political parties identified

young women and Muslim women as two categories that are easily discernible, for example when entering a meeting hall.

'The vast majority are young women, you will have to look closely to find women that are w/ro [reference to a married woman] or those you address as 'antu' [reference to an elder]. This I have noted not just here in Addis and my locality but even in our membership in the regions, young women dominate.' (female political party member)

'Except for the few members that are educated and active in leadership, the vast majority of the women are not educated; their awareness level is quite low ... for example if you ask them about their party programme, policy, rules and regulations including party by-laws, the majority do not know anything about it.' (Timret leadership)

NEBE representatives that worked closely with female political party members, particularly in the lead-up to the election, noted that although it is difficult to give a definitive picture about the diversity of women in political parties, the manner in which the parties are formed/organised, often along ethnic and regional lines, suggests that the female members are diverse in terms of regional and ethnic background.

With regards to self-identifiers such as age and education, NEBE's feedback showed that there is a mix in terms of age, with members ranging from the youth to senior citizens, and educational status – ranging from professional women to those with no education. The experience of NEBE with a relatively large group of women may have made it more qualified to make such an observation.

### Entry into politics

Discussions with study participants show that entry into politics, especially political party membership, occurred in different ways: family influence (social environment, including where they grew up), conscious decision on the part of the women and being approached and recruited by political parties. The intersection of factors of identity



has a bearing on each of these routes. Political parties recruited both educated women and women with a low socio-economic status; religion was also seen to be a factor. Women who took conscious decisions to join political parties were educated, had a higher socio-economic status and a family history of political participation.

A direct approach by political parties to join the party led to entry for some respondents. According to the experience of study participants, when political parties approach women for membership, their educational status, professional engagement, public profile and religious identity play an important role. As one participant with a tertiary education shared:

‘Had it not been for my education, and my work profile which has made me known in the public eye, I do not think that they would have approached me. Being an educated woman adds to their profile.’ (female political party member)

The participant shared that the importance of educational status has been repeatedly highlighted in communication to women like her in the party. It is a factor in the journey of recruitment for membership, candidacy during elections and even after winning elections and occupying elected positions. This vetting process contributes to privileging women with this particular status.

Another participant, who has not pursued higher education, reiterated this point:

‘The current approach of looking at the education and professional profile of women in recruiting them to party membership appears to be more of a recruitment for jobs. No one checks their motivation and dedication to the cause of the party. There is no time and room for consciousness raising on the programmes of the political party. This is completely different from the journey I travelled in joining my party, where the emphasis was more on dedication to party programme rather than educational status.’ (female political member)

This is indicative of political parties’ belief that the electorate is more disposed to vote for candidates with higher educational status, thus their wish to leverage women with such status. The potentially exclusionary effect on women who are less educated or uneducated has been noted.

Another participant shared the role of religion in identifying female candidates for particular constituencies, adding another layer to the kind of factors that shaped the strategy that political parties used in preparing for the elections:

‘During the election, I have seen candidates of parties being moved from one constituency to another because of the claim that their religion is more appropriate to constituencies that share similar religion.’ (female political party member)

Some women in this study took steps to join political parties on their own accord:

‘I did not have the plan to get into politics. I came to take part in meetings and discussions through the encouragement of my friends ... I was in one of the meetings that was endorsing the political programme – out of 40 representatives, I was the only female. I said to myself if I don’t get in who will represent women and their interests ... my presence in these kinds of meetings and my observation of how gender-equality issues are addressed (mis-addressed) are the triggers for my joining of the party. I realised that if there is no one with consciousness to correct these people, it would be wrong ... Maybe it is my feminist consciousness that has made me ask these questions and eventually led me to this decision.’ (female political party member)

Apart from her access to a political party, it was the above participant’s interest in addressing issues that affect women that prompted her to join a political party. Similarly, another participant explained her experience as follows:

‘I have lived abroad where I have seen women’s rights protected. While I was abroad, I used to hear of the different kinds of cruelty and abuses affecting women, like women being victims of acid attacks and much more. I always wondered what could be done to change this, to address this ... I did not think that I had this passion. I hated politics like something dirty. What changed my mind was the realisation that I, as an individual, cannot do anything meaningful on my own. I needed to be part of a bigger system that would allow me to voice my concern. That is how I came to join politics.’ (female political party member)

This participant’s experience shows that women’s decisions and choices influence the organising principles behind political parties. Another participant shared her own experience and that of like-minded colleagues in her party:

‘From the outset, we said let us change the political arena and discourse from mere obsession with ethnic identity, which has been the dominant feature of our politics for the last 50 years, to that of everyday survival, bread and butter issues. We were of the view that we needed to have educated people that can knowledgeably lead the country.’ (female political party member)

What is discernible from these experiences is that the participants’ gender identity, education and socio-economic status, including location (where they grew up and where they reside currently), all shaped their decision to become political party members. The narratives also highlight the kinds of political issues they sought to address.

Women who came to politics through their own decision also often come from families that were visibly involved in politics and political parties. The social environment within which they grew up influenced their awareness and the measures they took later on to follow in the footsteps of their family members. One described her journey as follows:

‘I hated politics even though my father was a known leader of one of the political parties in the country. It was actually after his passing that I realised that all the exposure I had, such as watching the news, the many discussions we had, were ingrained within me ... many of his stands were ones I also shared and it made me ask if not me who else and ended up joining. Politics is not something we leave for others.’ (female political party member)



‘I WAS THE ONLY FEMALE.  
I ASKED MYSELF WHO WILL  
REPRESENT WOMEN?’

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Similarly, another participant explained:

‘My father was into politics ... Other family members within the extended family were also into politics. I would say I grew up around politics talk and politicians, at home and in my extended family. Because of that I wanted to study either law or political science when I grew up, although I ended up studying something else in the end. I started with membership within my party. I was a rank-and-file member when I started although I climbed into becoming a member of the executive committee of the party later on.’ (female political party member)

These stories speak largely to the influence of the social environment that these women were exposed to from early on in their lives.

Women that were active in leadership and politics at large served as role models for some of the participants in their journey to join political parties. Even in these cases, the broader social environment and education were important factors in pursuing political lives.

‘In Benishangul region, some thirty years ago, it was rare to find women in leadership positions. The few women that I saw were educated. It was their education achievement that opened up opportunities to become members of the ruling party and then get positions. Looking at them motivated all of us in my locality to study hard and pursue our education. Had it not been for my exposure to these women and my educational qualification of getting first degree and then my master’s degree, I would not have been able to join the women’s league of my party and later on assume leadership position within the women’s federation.’ (female political party member)

Benishangul, with its diverse ethnic groups, provides an interesting picture of the intersection of ethnicity, gender and educational status in women’s introduction to and entry into political parties. Some ethnic groups have had better access to education than others. According to study participants from that region, this has resulted in

women from one ethnic group being over-represented in the political party of the region (a political party allied to the EPRDF, the previous ruling party) and, by extension, in government positions. The intersection of gender, ethnic identity and education does not, however, lead to the same outcome all the time. There are times when ethnic identity eclipses advantages that may come from education when intersecting with education.

‘Although there were qualified women [higher educational level such as university degree], other women with low level of education such as elementary and high school are seen approached for membership of a political party and candidacy during elections.’ (female political party member)

Women with a lower educational status (elementary to high school education) shared that it was the motivation to support their family through engaging in political party organs such as women’s leagues and federations that paved the way to their membership. Their gender identity and low socio-economic status were the main factors for entry into these organs. One participant put her experience as follows:

‘I was not able to finish high school as I was busy raising my nine children. As life became difficult, I was desperate to get any employment and my friends in the neighbourhood suggested that I approach the kebele administration people and for opportunities to join the EPRDF, the ruling party at the time. I attended several trainings and awareness creation sessions and then proceeded to become a member of the women’s league as my entry into the party. I was vocal and active. This opened the door for me to be elected into positions of leadership within the league and later on women’s federation. Many of my friends in a similar position are active in these collectives as well as in their local administration.’ (female political party member)

The journey and entry into political party membership reveals a complex picture. Intersecting factors such as level of education/class, gender, social environment

and region (place of birth and growing up, particularly urban places) placed some study participants in an ideal position to join political parties. Although these factors motivated some women into action, they were also seen as vetting criteria used by political parties in recruiting female members. This may have the effect of privileging women with these particular identities and excluding others.

The journeys of the participants of this study show that the outcomes of the intersection of identities may be contingent, varied and complex, as the literature on intersectionality and women's political empowerment highlights.<sup>32</sup>

### **Engagement and experience in political parties and in broader politics**

Beyond membership, the women in this study engaged actively in different ways in their respective political parties. Some played leadership roles in their parties, represented their parties as candidates in the recent election or took part in the collective Timret. Others engaged in government in elected positions.

From the experiences that the participants in this study shared, patriarchal views that consider women as inferior and not suitable for public life in general and politics in particular are obstacles to women's active engagement in political parties. Furthermore, once they are members, these patriarchal views also impact their positions and progress within political parties. This is in line with the broader literature on women and politics in the Ethiopian context.<sup>33</sup>

'One thing that astonishes me is that you do not see political parties promoting them into leadership; it is either leaving them there as rank-and-file members or giving them small roles like that of secretary, discipline committee and the like and this is not the way to promote women. Mind you, the ones that have come up are the ones that have some level of capacity; you can definitely make use of them in party decision-making organs and they can contribute to programme and policy development.' (female political party member)

For those women who have managed to enter into politics, patriarchy serves to shame them and at times makes use of their femininity, for example to attract more members into the party.

'A woman's place is at home.' (female political party member)

'You also see us being objectified by the broader community, seeing us not as politicians/party members only but rather as sex objects.' (female political party member)

'Because you are beautiful, you attract more people, were the remarks. I have seen this in action.' (female political party member)

Patriarchal views are even more severe against young women in political parties. Young female politicians that participated in this study shared how comments and views about their gender and age make their engagement in the party difficult.

'Seeing how young I was there were a lot of comments both within the party and outside. What is a small girl doing here? How am I supposed to sit with this small girl/child on serious matters affecting the youth?' (female political party member)

'I participated as a candidate in the recent elections. The community members when they saw my picture and saw me on election day, they were like, "What is this small child doing here?"' (female political party member)

As much as age is used to discredit female politicians, their age and gender identity are also used by political parties as mechanisms for attracting more young and female members into the party.

‘The party itself says it is good for its image and they tell us go and bring your friends; you will attract more youth and females.’ (female political party member)

According to one study participant, views on women’s age and gender identity which appear innocent are actually disempowering expressions of power.

‘Being called “konjit” [beautiful] “tinishwa lij”, [small girl] by saying these kinds of things they try and take away your power. So as not [to] be perceived as less cute, you end up speaking less; that is how these sayings take away your power.’ (female political party member)

According to study participants, marital status also has a strong bearing on women’s political engagement. The literature on women in politics in Ethiopia bears this out.<sup>34</sup> Young unmarried women shared that their status means they have more time to engage in work in their respective political parties.

‘The young women are unencumbered by family responsibilities.’ (female political party member)

‘Among the women, many of the female party members are not married. It is interesting that you would see most are youngsters from 25 to 30/35; it is rare to find women older than that.’ (female political party member)

Married women with children, on the other hand, raised the difficulties that arise from their status in terms of time constraints, interference by spouses and even by extended family and the wider community.

‘Family, including husbands, are of concern. Families and spouses/ partners do not always support us to engage in politics. I know of a colleague whose marriage broke down when she engaged in politics as the husband was against it.’ (female political party member)

‘It also requires commitment; you have to be willing to invest your time and energy over a period of time.’ (female political party member)

As noted, women’s education level also affects their ascent into leadership positions in their parties. This is in line with the literature that posits socio-economic status as an important predictor of women’s participation in politics.<sup>35</sup> Several participants stated that education, particularly at the level of university or college, is important for engagement in political parties.



MOST FEMALE PARTY MEMBERS ARE BETWEEN 25 AND 35 YEARS OLD



‘The women in leadership positions are mostly educated – with higher education but not so much at lower level or rank-and-file members.’ (female political party member)

‘Women that are not educated, let alone to advocate for others, they cannot even ask for their own rights. But it is these kinds of women that you see in different women’s associations that are meant to funnel women into political parties.’ (female political party member)

Socio-economic status as a factor shaping women’s engagement in political parties is a broad marker of identity that can cover both education and income. Focusing on economic status, particularly one’s income/earning capacity, female political party members in this study shared the detrimental role economic position can play in women’s engagement in political parties. Previous studies have shown the shortcoming of ensuring allocation of government support for female candidates actually goes to women; this is yet to be taken up in the electoral laws.<sup>36</sup>

Narrating her own experience and that of a similarly situated colleague, one participant stated:

‘If you do not have sufficient income or someone to support you, it is difficult to survive in political parties. I have a friend who has left politics altogether simply for lack of means to support herself and do politics at the same time.’ (female political party member)

The information from study participants also suggests that the requirements of the election law on candidacy and campaigning complicate matters further. Sharing her experience in this regard, one respondent who participated in the recent election said:

‘I would say the primary exclusionary factor is economic status. As it stands women have lower economic standing compared to men. Imagine, there is this provision of the law that says in your final days of campaigning you have to give up your work – take leave of absence or something; what am I supposed to do, how I am supposed to support myself and my dependents?’ (female political party member)

## Descriptive vs. substantive representation and intersectionality

An interesting aspect to examine in terms of intersectional identity and its outcomes is how female political party members navigate the agendas/issues of their respective parties. Are they caught between the agendas of their parties and different aspects of their own identity? What issues have they brought to the agenda because of their presence as members and leaders? How have their identities shaped these agenda items?

Substantive representation is about what is going on during representation (in membership, leadership) – what kinds of interests, questions and agenda items are discussed among representatives? Diverse representation ideally has the potential to allow for the interests of diverse groups to be reflected in the discussions and agendas of political parties.

Study participants commented on the push for and adoption of a gender-equality agenda within their respective parties.

‘Political parties have to be pushed to adopt a stand and programmes on gender equality. In my party, for example, the women members have to take a stand and push for the adoption of such policy and programme statements. If we were not there, I am sure the party would have nothing on women and gender equality.’ (female political party member)

‘We make sure that as the Timret leadership that we get the opportunity to speak in forums like the ye gara mikir bet [the political party collective/platfor]. There we push and even shame political parties to bring women into leadership as well as increase female membership.’ (female political party member)

Women’s presence has thus led to women’s issues being put on the agenda in various forms, including bringing women into party leadership and fielding women as party candidates. Women have resisted the structures of power to pursue their political objectives.

‘When our party leadership was imprisoned due to anti-terrorist laws then, what is amazing was it was mainly the women in our party of course with our male colleagues that were pushing forward but the price paid was too much – it led to loss of jobs, there was violence ... against us and because of this some of the women left politics altogether.’ (female political party member)

The creation of the women’s collective Timret, which brings together female members of all registered political parties, is also a collective form of resistance. Timret was established with the intention of bringing together women across party lines to advocate for women’s rights and advancement within political parties and politics.

More highly educated study participants emphasised their educational status as an important factor contributing to where they are today. They pointed out that a low level or lack of education among women is a major challenge to women’s engagement in politics through participation in political parties. They added that the move towards ensuring substantive representation is slow, despite the increase in women’s numbers in parliament.

Experiences of educated women in this study show that education alone may not be a game changer in terms of ensuring substantive representation.

‘There are many women like me that are PhD holders. But my experience thus far has shown me that it has not been possible to bring up women’s issues on the agenda item for discussion, be it at party level or at the elected positions that we occupy.’ (female political party member)

## Conclusions and recommendations

The data from this study shows that there is a diversity of women in political parties. This diversity is in terms of ethnicity, region, religion, class status (education and income levels), age and marital status. The intersection of these identities shapes both the entry into politics and the experiences of women in political parties. The picture that emerges from the stories told by the women in this study is complex, contingent on context and

varied among the different women, thus allowing for only qualified observations with respect to factors that facilitate or exclude women’s entry into politics.

Patriarchy is a major barrier to women’s entry into politics and achieving substantive roles and representation in politics. Although patriarchy affects all women, its impact on their participation in politics is not necessarily the same. Entry into politics and securing substantive roles in politics is easier for certain women than for others.

‘When I became a candidate of my party, not even my own family members supported and voted for me. They opted for the opposition politicians. They said politics is for men.’ (female political party member)

At the level of individual experience, the stories of the female respondents show that their level of engagement, the outcomes thereof and what these things mean to them differ from woman to woman. What propels some women into politics and excludes others is a complex issue. The factors that propel some women may not necessarily end up empowering them enough towards substantive representation, such as bringing women’s issues onto the agenda, changing public views or climbing the ladder.

Factors that typically act as barriers, such as a low level of education and a marginalised ethnic identity, have in some instances opened avenues for women in terms of gaining political positions, for instance in leadership roles in their parties and even in government.

‘It is the ethnicity of women, being from marginalised ethnic groups, that have allowed them to occupy such high positions in our region [Benishangul] because look at me and those from other ethnic groups. We are better educated but because we are said to represent the majority within our region, getting positions within our parties and regional administration becomes difficult.’ (female political party member)

The entry into politics of women from marginalised ethnic groups is principally explained by the nature of

the federal system, which is based on the representation of ethnic groups at both regional and federal levels. Yet, as the account above notes, entry into politics does not necessarily translate into a substantive role in leadership. The account also highlights that having a better education does not always translate into positions of leadership in political parties.

Going beyond these individual experiences, intersectional analysis shows the power operating at the meso/organisational/political party level. Intersecting factors of identity – education, ethnic identity, age, region and religion – are important factors for attracting women into political party membership, leadership and further engagement. Quantitative data shows a relatively high number of women with tertiary education, in particular university degrees, in the recent election, accounting for 59.25% of the total female candidates.<sup>37</sup> Education is also used by political parties as an important vetting criterion for recruitment of members.

Similarly, the observation by political party leaders and leaders of Timret on young women dominating political parties shows the importance accorded to age. The call by political parties for young female members to attract and bring more ‘women like them’ strengthens this conclusion.

The dominant approach of political parties does not favour women with low education and older women. This approach to women’s participation privileges certain categories of women over others, thereby resulting in the limited representation and participation of women in politics. This impacts democratic representation, which is premised on the equality of every person rather than level of education or age.

## There is an urgent need for a review of policy and legal frameworks that depict women as homogeneous groups

Political parties maintain existing systems of power or hierarchy by pursuing and/or attracting women with particular identities. Although having a lower education, being older and being from a marginalised ethnic group leads to the exclusion of a certain category of women, this does not mean that there are not such women in politics. Those who break ranks in this regard disrupt power systems and the organisation of politics.

Institutional actors like NEBE also inadvertently contribute to the maintenance of oppressive power systems that privilege some women over others through their regulatory frameworks that insist on placing women into homogeneous categories. What approaches and mechanisms could contribute to a more holistic representation of women in political parties?

The current discussion on women and politics has to go beyond examining the extent to which women are represented in politics. It needs to explore



HIGH EDUCATION DOES  
NOT GUARANTEE A  
LEADERSHIP POSITION

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which women are represented and the degree to which women from marginalised groups are represented. While the increased representation of women in general remains critical, for it to be meaningful it is necessary to represent women in their full diversity. The approach of waiting until there is a sufficient number of women in politics before calling for diversity will be costly in the long run. The following recommendations should be considered by government, political parties and civil society:

- Evidence generation: The emerging picture from the experiences of the participants of the study shows the need for robust evidence generation, including data. This will facilitate a better understanding among policymakers, CSOs and political parties of the impact of intersections of identity, including factors that facilitate and exclude women, in order to ensure the holistic representation of diverse categories of women in politics. Educational and research institutions with the required expertise and resources should make intersectional analysis in political participation an agenda for investigation.
- Policy and legal frameworks: There is an urgent need for a review of current policy and legal frameworks that depict women as homogeneous groups. In its review of the women's policy, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs should adopt an intersectional lens in order to recognise the diversity among women. Similarly, NEBE's reviews of electoral laws and directives should adopt an intersectional lens to avoid binary distinctions between women and men. CSOs

have an important advocacy role in reviewing policies and laws. CSOs can influence agenda setting and mobilise stakeholders for successful reviews.

- Review of political party by-laws and programmes: Political party by-laws guide the recruitment and engagement of women within political parties. Reviews of by-laws and programmes that recognise the multiple sources of disadvantage among different categories of women are important. CSOs, particularly those working on women and leadership, can advocate for such an expanded frame in party by-laws and programmes. Changes in electoral laws that adopt an intersectional lens have the positive effect of influencing political party behaviour, including by-laws.
- Intersectionality-conscious mobilisation: Women's engagement in public life, including politics, requires active mobilisation. The government, grassroots organisations, CSOs and political parties all engage in mobilisation efforts in different ways. Through its women and social affairs structures and affiliated women's development groups, the government reaches and mobilises women in their localities. Grassroots organising by government-affiliated groups, such as through women development army groups, constitutes another form of mobilisation. Mobilisation actions must consider the diversity among women in order to reach all categories of women. Increasing the consciousness of frontline actors working in mobilisation is important. This requires more data and targeted training of actors involved in mobilisation work.

## Notes

- 1 Three political parties – Prosperity, EZEMA and Liberty and Equality – fielded the highest number of female candidates for the recent election.
- 2 Attempts at securing access to political party programme documents proved fruitless. This study thus utilised data from a study conducted immediately prior to the election, which reviewed the political party programme documents of over 70 parties.
- 3 PH Collins, Intersectionality's definitional dilemmas, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41, 2015, pp 3.
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- 5 Ibid., 3.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 SF Joireman, Opposition politics and ethnicity in Ethiopia: We will all go down together, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 35:3, 1997, p 387.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Y Petros, A survey of political parties in Ethiopia, *Northeast African Studies*, 13:2/3, 1991, pp.144-146. See also T Aaron, Identity politics, citizenship and democratization in Ethiopia, *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 2:1/2, 2006, pp. 56-58.
- 10 Ibid., 7.
- 11 E Yimer, Ethiopia's Post-EPRDF transition: Challenges in identifying and defining the major stakeholders, *International Journal of Ethiopian studies*, 9:1&2, 2015, pp 73-75.
- 12 National elections did not take place in the regional state of Tigray in 2021.
- 13 B Zewde (ed.), *Documenting the Ethiopian student movement: An exercise in oral history*, Forum for Social Studies, 2010, Addis Ababa.
- 14 EH Mengesha and R Yascahlew, Mapping of political parties and gender equality: National case study (Gender audit of political parties), UN Women, 2020.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 EH Mengesha and R Yascahlew, Mapping of political parties and gender equality: National case study (Gender audit of political parties), UN Women, 2020.
- 18 The women's policy is currently under revision.
- 19 In addition to gender/sex, the law recognises the importance of permanent residency in regions (which appears to be a proxy for ethnicity) in the formation of political parties. Regarding the founding members of political parties at both national and regional levels, the law has put a threshold on representation of permanent residents of regions. Accordingly, at regional level, more than 60% 2,400 of the total of 4,000 founding members shall be permanent residents of the regional state for which the party is registering. At national level, not more than 40% (4 000) of the 10 000 founding members shall be residents of the same region. The remaining founding members shall be residents of at least four other regions, with the number of founding members that are residents in each region constituting not less than 15% of the total number of founding members.
- 20 The speaker represented the Somali regional state.
- 21 EH Mengesha, M Kasshun, A Munive, F Wong and R Griffith, Gender equality landscaping report, Global Center for Gender Equality, Stanford University, 2020.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Interview with representative of NEBE gender structure, 25/07/2022.
- 24 Interview with representative of directorate responsible for women's empowerment at MoWSA , 28/07/2022.
- 25 EH Mengesha and R Yascahlew, Mapping of political parties and gender equality: National case study (Gender audit of political parties), UN Women, 2020.
- 26 Interview with Setwait 02/08/2022.
- 27 EH Mengesha and R Yascahlew, Mapping of political parties and gender equality: National case study (Gender audit of political parties), UN Women, 2020.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Directive No. 3/2020 on the Obligations of Registered National and Regional Political Parties (under Proclamation 1162/2019), Article 7, 1, C – eligibility for candidature; has continuously resided in the constituency of his intended candidature for one year before election day; or whose place of birth is in the constituency of his intended candidature.
- 30 NE Brown, Political participation of women of color: An intersectional analysis, *Journal of Women, Politics and Policy*, 35:4, 2014, p 316.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 MM Hughes and JK Dubrow, Intersectionality and women's political empowerment, in AC Alexander, C Bolzendahl and F Jalalzai (eds.), *Measuring women's political empowerment across the globe: Strategies, challenges and future research*, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p 90.
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- 34 Ibid.
- 35 NE Brown, Political participation of women of color: An intersectional analysis, *Journal of Women, Politics and Policy*, 35:4, 2014, pages. pp.316.
- 36 EH Mengesha and R Yascahlew, Mapping of political parties and gender equality: National case study (Gender audit of political parties), UN Women, 2020.
- 37 See Chart 3 above. NEBE website, [www.nebe.et](http://www.nebe.et). accessed 22 June 2022, compiled by author.



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