



## **Gendered Political Leadership Trends and Future Prospect in Tanzania: a Lesson from Ileje District Council**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the gendered political leadership trend and future prospects of in Tanzania by taking experience from Ileje district council in Songwe region of Tanzania. This study adopted feminist legal theory as a base in examining the men – women relations in political leadership. The study was cross-sectionally designed whereby data were collected at a single time with a good mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches to inductively and deductively study the underrepresentation of women in political leadership positions. The study applied two major methods of data collection which are; the documentary review method which used a checklist tool and the questionnaire survey method which used questionnaires as tools which were designed in the Kobo Toolbox and the link was distributed through WhatsApp groups of women from three wards namely; Mlale, Itumba and Isongole found in Ileje District Council whereby 130 respondents fully participated and submitted the completed questionnaires. The study found that women's participation in contesting for political positions was generally low. Also, the trend and prospects of women's political representation were very low, and achieving gender parity in political leadership is not promising. The study recommends that the government and stakeholders of gendered political leadership should address all major hindrances of achieving gender parity in political leadership while obeying the nature of the dichotomy of men-women relations.

**Keywords:** Political Participation; Political Representation; Underrepresentation of women; Political Leadership; Gendered Politics.

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## Introduction

The underrepresentation of women in political leadership positions has drawn great attention globally as a political problem that needs public attention (Mutasingwa, 2023). Women are marginalized from the political sphere due to discriminatory practices and laws, gender stereotypes, bad attitudes, low levels of education, family commitments, and poverty among women (Sharma, 2020). Women's political representation in national parliaments has been a historical problem across several decades as it only rose from 11.3 percent in 1995 to 22 percent in 2015 while in 37 countries it was still below 10 percent in 2015 (Rusimbi & Israel, 2017). Furthermore, the UN Leadership and Political Participation report shows that in 2019 women parliamentarians ranged at 24.3 percent only, and only 11 women were serving as heads of state while only 12 were serving as heads of government throughout the World with hundreds of states (UN, 2019). In 2023 the global average of women in national parliaments was only around 25 percent while that of men was over 70 percent (Mutasingwa, 2023). These statistics show that women are underrepresented politically across the World.

Underrepresentation of women has existed for several years in developed countries as a historical problem, for example, in 2004 women presidents' representation was as low as 6.7 percent in Asia, 6.5 percent in Europe, and 5 percent in America (Iwanaga, 2008) while women parliamentarians in 2004 were only 8.3 percent in India, 11.1 percent in Indonesia, 9.1 percent in Malaysia and 20.2 percent in China (Iwanaga, 2008). The problem persists in developed countries in recent years, in Indonesia until 2021 women's political representation was below 25 percent (Aspinall et al., 2021). By 2019 in the US, women held 24 percent of the seats in Congress, while the US Senate had only 25 percent representation by women (Sharma, 2020). Similarly, in India with a 48 percent female population in the recent national election of 2019, women made up only 9 percent of all contesting political candidates, and only 14 percent of those were elected to the parliament (Jensenius, 2019). In Bangladesh, the underrepresentation of women in political positions still exists due to cultural aspects (Nazrul, 2024).



The problem of women's underrepresentation in political positions is also revealed in African Countries and the problem is not of recent creation but has existed for several decades (Sharma, 2020). For example, dating back to 2012 the percentage of women Parliamentarians was as low as in Egypt (02%), Nigeria (6.8%), Congo (7.3%), Gambia (7.8%), Angola (38.2%), Burundi (30.5%) and all other African Countries were below 50% except Rwanda which had 56.3 percent (Bauer, 2012). The women's political representation throughout Sub-Saharan Africa in 2019 was only 23.9 percent (UN, 2019). In 2023 women's political representation was still low as it was South Africa at 46.8 percent, Rwanda at 61.3 percent, Uganda at 34.4 percent, Egypt at 27.4 percent, Kenya at 21.8 percent and only Rwanda was over 50 percent (Iyeshim, 2023). These statistics prove that there is an underrepresentation of women in political positions compared to men in African countries.

The problem of underrepresentation of women in political positions has extended even to Tanzania, in contrast, there is a low growth rate of the percentage of women parliamentarians who get the chance after general elections, for example, 21.5 percent in 2000, 30.3 percent in 2005 and 35 percent in 2010 while it was only 36 percent in 2012 (Bauer, 2012). The parliamentary Hansard shows that in (2022) there were less than 15 percent of women parliamentarians who were members of parliament with constituencies (UTR, 2019). Therefore, these statistics of women in political positions globally, in developed nations as well as in Africa and Tanzania show that women are underrepresented as compared to men at global and local levels. There have been several efforts made at global and local levels to empower women politically. For example, the government of Tanzania has included good conditions for women in The Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania like Article 78 (1) and Article 66(i)(b) (URT, 1977). Also, Article 66 of the United Republic of Tanzania Constitution provides that the number of women parliamentarians should not be less than 30 percent of all Members of Parliament. Multi-party democracy reintroduced in 1992 gives more room for women to get into political positions (URT, 1977).



Despite all these efforts, there is still an underrepresentation of women in political positions at different levels in Tanzania (Killian & Hyle, 2020). For example, from 2020 to 2024 there was less than 20 percent of women parliamentarians with constituencies (UTR, 2019). Different studies like Kassa, (2015); and Secha, (2020) have been carried out on this area but do not clearly show the real trend and future prospect of representation of women in political positions, particularly at Ileje District Council which is the concern of this study.

### **Literature Review**

In the Global context, according to Mechkova (2024), studies show that many countries have implemented gender quotas or actively tried to increase women's political representation. The study found that women's representation only promotes human development if corruption is at low levels, while under high levels of corruption women's inclusion is associated with worsened development outcomes. Sharma's (2020) study focused on identifying the dimensions of the political empowerment of Indian women and assessing the factors responsible. The major factors found to affect the political empowerment of women were; information, family environment, legal environment, political environment, and personal ambitions in politics. For the Indonesian context, Wayan & Nyoman (2020) found that cultural barriers were the key factors that hindered women's political representation in Indonesia at Gianyar Regency Bali. Also, Aspinall *et al.*, (2021) added that although Indonesia celebrates being one of the most successful examples of democratic transition of recent decades still women are represented in a small number and had little impact on Indonesia's national legislature.

For the African context, the study of Iyeshim (2023) points out that there is high political inequality between men and women across several countries in Africa. The study found that Women and underrepresented despite several efforts to achieve gender parity in Africa. The actual trend and future prospects of women's political representation remain uncovered by the study. Starting with Nigeria, Onwa & Nwogbaga (2019) studied political participation in the 2015 general election and found that the marginalization of women is manifested in politics in Nigeria where men use several strategies to alienate women from participating in



politics. The paper also showed several challenges hindering the effective participation of women in the political process in Nigeria. Similarly, Adamu's (2023) study in Nigeria on Women's participation in politics examined the challenges and prospects to Nigerian democracy. The study revealed that the representation of women was generally low compared to that of men and there were several barriers to such problems including cultural, economic, and legal amongst others that have affected the participation of women in politics. Also, Iloka, & Ojukwu (2021) found that despite the Beijing conference which requires every country to reserve 35 percent of positions and offices for women, in Nigeria Women are marginalized in politics because of social, cultural, and religious factors. Therefore, there is underrepresentation of women in politics in Nigeria. However, these studies remain silent on whether the trend is promising and the real future prospect is not addressed and needs to be known for good planning in the Tanzanian context.

For the case of Cameroon, Fokum, *et al.*(2020) used the concept of descriptive and substantive representation within the framework of the critical mass theory to investigate the extent to which an increase in the presence of women in the Cameroonian parliament will affect the quality of women's issues presented to parliament. In the study, eleven female parliamentarians were interviewed. The study reveals that an increase in the number of women does not significantly enhance substantive representation of women's issues. For these results, more women in parliaments and other political positions does not imply that women agendas will be put forward.

Amoah (2024) used qualitative methodology to examine gender inequality in legislative representation in Ghana and the challenges to achieving equality. The study found that there are factors like inadequate financial resources, the electoral system, the absence of gender quota laws, the nature of political parties, and the nature of Ghana's patriarchal society account for the low representation of women in Ghana's Parliament. The study does not show the real trend and prospect of women's political representation in Ghana. Lihiru (2022). explored suitable electoral system(s) for the promotion of women's representation in Tanzania and Rwanda from a legal standpoint. The study found that the first-past-the-post



(FPTP) electoral system applied in Tanzania operates without candidate gender thresholds and consequently does not encourage political parties to nominate women candidates. The proportional representation (PR) electoral system applied in Rwanda has set at 30 percent of women's political representation something which has increased women's political representation and made Rwanda a global leader in women's representation in parliament. The study does not clearly show the trend and future prospects of women's political representation at local levels particularly in constituencies of Tanzania to understand the real changes happening in achieving gender parity in political leadership.

Mutasingwa (2023) Conducted a study in Tanzania to check the effectiveness of the Quota System in influencing women's Representation. The study applied exploratory research design and both qualitative and quantitative approaches to ascertain if this is the case. The findings revealed that the quota system has become important in enhancing women's descriptive representation. However, the system does not favour women's substantive representation something which makes men remain the dominant gender in leadership positions. This trend is seen to be a result of various factors which cannot easily be changed like biological differences between men and women (Killian & Hyle, 2020). At this point of the study, the trend and future prospect of women's political representation have not been addressed

Similarly, the study conducted by Killian & Hyle (2020) using post-structural feminism and interviews with six ministries in Tanzania indicates that societal attitudes and practices contribute to women's continual inactive participation in leadership roles in Tanzania. These findings in this preexisting literature imply that women continue to be underrepresented in political leadership in Tanzania as a result of their negative attitude toward politics. At this point of the study, the trend and future prospects of women's political representation have not been addressed.

Makalanga (2023) examined the achievement and limitations of Women's Representation in Tanzania's Local Government Authorities (LGAs). The study surveyed 390 household heads, and the findings revealed that the quota system, electoral procedures, the character of



political parties, poor gender relations between men and women, and the financial challenges of women remain the major factors for the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in local politics of Tanzania. However, the study does not show the real trend and future prospects of women's political representation in Tanzania.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopted feminist legal theory also known as feminist jurisprudence, the theory assumes that the historical subordination of women is a result of laws that have put men – women dichotomy by positioning men in superior positions against women in social, economic, and political spheres of human life (Wandaka, 2019). The feminist legal theory directly goes with two aspects of Liberal and Radical feminism. The liberal feminist approaches were the fight for equality of political rights in the sense that women as human beings are like men and are entitled to equal political rights. Radical feminism sees society as patriarchally structured to subordinate women. The radicals in addition argued that the law, state, and social institutions are all structured in the favour and interest of the male class against the women hence; they called for its end (Wandaka, 2019). In respect of this study women's underrepresentation is viewed to be a result of these laws which place women under men and liberation of women for equality in political rights is done with less achievement of gender parity in political positions due to historical subordination of women by the laws.

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted at the Ileje district council in the Songwe region found in the southern highland of Tanzania. The study was cross-sectionally designed whereby data were collected at only a single point in time with a good mix of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to inductively and deductively study the gender in political leadership positions. The study applied the two major methods of data collection which are; documentary review methods which used a checklist tool and questionnaire survey method which used questionnaires as tools which were designed in Kobo Toolbox and the link was distributed in several WhatsApp groups of women in the three wards of Ileje District Council namely;





Mlale, Itumba, and Isongole whereby 130 respondents fully participated and submitted the completed questionnaires.

## Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study and discusses the findings concerning the theory and preexisting studies in this subject matter. It starts with a presentation and discussion of the demographic information of respondents and then presents the findings of the study followed by a discussion of the findings.

### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study involved collecting demographic information of respondents which included marital status, age, education level, political affiliation, and occupation. The collected demographic characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 1:

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n=130)**

<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>	<b>Responses of Respondents</b>	
<b>Marital Status of Respondents</b>	<b>Frequency (F)</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Single	30	23.08
Married	79	60.77
Divorced	21	16.5
<b>Age of Respondents</b>	<b>Frequency (F)</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
21 – 30	38	29.23
31 – 40	48	36.92
41 – 50	32	24.62
51 – 60	10	07.69
Above 60	02	01.54
<b>Education Level of Respondents</b>	<b>Frequency (F)</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Primary	30	23.08
Secondary	52	40.00
Certificate	18	13.85
Diploma	12	09.23
Bachelor +	18	13.85
<b>Occupation of Respondents</b>	<b>Frequency (F)</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Entrepreneur	43	33.08
Peasant	37	28.46





Public Servant	30	23.08
Private Sector	08	06.15
Family Mother	07	05.38
Students	05	03.85
Political Affiliation	<b>Frequency (F)</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
A member of Political Party	70	53.85
Non-Member of Political Party	60	46.15

**Source:** Field data, (2024)

From data in Table 1: It is noted that this study included several respondents varying in their demographic characteristics. Starting with marital status, a good number of respondents 79 (60.77%) of all 130 respondents were married, 30 (23.08%) of all 130 respondents were single and only 21 (16.5%) were divorced. For the case of Age of respondents, most of the respondents were aged between 31 - 40 years old counting 48 (36.92%) of all respondents and followed by those aged 21 - 30 who counted 38 (29.23%) of all 130 respondents whereas there were only 02(01.54%) aged above 60. These results imply that youth participated in large numbers in the study. Regarding the education level of respondents, most of the respondents counted 52(40.00%) of all 130 respondents had secondary education followed by those who had a primary level of education who counted 30(23.08%). Only 18 (13.85%) of all 130 respondents had education level of Bachelor degree and above. Regarding occupation of respondents, most of the respondents 43(33.08%) were entrepreneurs and peasants were the second largest in number who counted 37(28.46%). In the aspect of political affiliation, 70(53.85%) of all 130 respondents were members of political parties while 60(46.15%) had no political affiliation. In general, the study included respondents of different ages, marital statuses, occupations, education levels, and political affiliations.

### **Trend and Status of Women's Political Representation**

This section presents and provides a discussion of information regarding the status of women's participation in contesting for political positions, trends of women's representation in various political positions in different years, trends of women's representation in various



political positions, and future prospects of women's political representation in various political positions at Ileje District

### 5.2.1 Status of Women's Participation as Contestants in Political Positions

The respondents were asked to tell whether they have ever contested for any political position among the listed political positions, the responses of respondents were captured and presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Status of Women's Participation as Contestants in Political Positions from 2000 to 2020**

Political Position	Frequency (F)	Percent (%)
Village Chairperson	05	03.85
Ward Councillor	05	03.85
Councillor for Special Seat	09	06.92
Parliamentarian with Constituency	00	00
Parliamentarian for Special Seat	01	0.77
Never Contested	110	84.62

**Source:** Field data, (2024)

The data show that the majority of women accounting for 110(84.62%) of all 130 women who participated in the study have never contested for any political position. Among the 04 political positions studied only 15.38 percent of all 130 women have ever contested for political position and this does not mean that they won political positions but they just contested. For the positions of Village chairperson and ward councilor each had 3.85 percent of women contested and for the special seat of ward councilor 6.92 percent of women contested and there were zero (0%) for a parliamentary position with constituency and only 0.77% for the special seat of member of parliament. These are alarming results under a democratic electoral system with an emphasis on achieving gender parity in political representation. The results imply that the status of women contesting for political positions of different levels like village chairperson, ward councillors, and parliamentarian positions is lower than expected in democratic elections. Achieving gender parity for this status remains a big puzzle and this can be attributed to several factors which are difficult to change like



biological background. The results conform to the theory like a feminist legal theory which assumes that women are placed at a lower level than men for decades and this must end. Also, the findings relate with those found by Makalanga (2023) who pointed out that the quota system, electoral procedures, the character of political parties, poor gender relations between men and women, and the financial challenges of women remain the major factors for the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in local politics of Tanzania. Also, the results of a recent study are not far from those of Onwa & Nwogbaga (2019) who found that the marginalization of women was manifested in politics in Nigeria where men used several strategies to alienate women from participating in politics in the general election of 2015 in Nigeria and there were several challenges hindered women to participate. Therefore, the decision of women to become contestants in political positions is hindered by several social, economic, and biological factors.

### **Status of Women's Participation as Contestants in Political Positions in various Election Years**

During data collection women who participated in the study were asked to tell the year of which they participated in contesting for any political position, the predetermined years of elections in Tanzania were put in place for them to make choices. The responses of respondents were recorded and presented as shown here:

**Table 2: Status of Women's Participation as Contestants in Political Positions in Various Years of Election**

<b>Political Position</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
1999/2000	00	00
2004/2005	04	03.08
2009/2010	04	03.08
2014/2015	07	05.38
2019/2020	05	03.85
Never Contested	110	84.62

**Source:** Field data (2024)



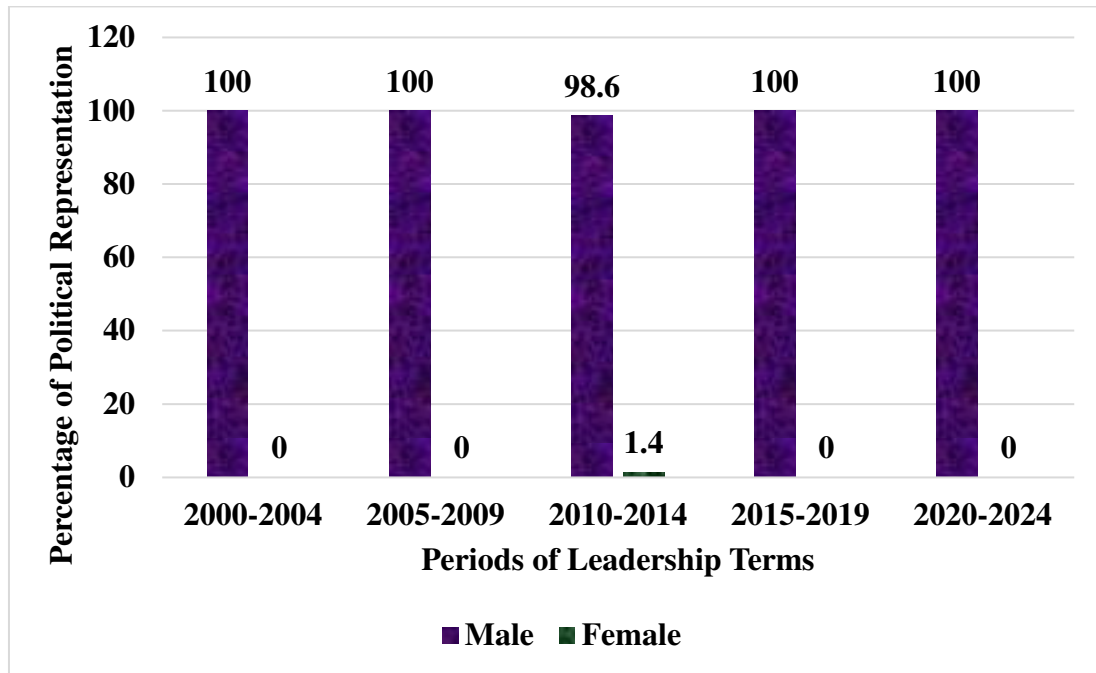
Based on the data, the trend of women's participation in contesting for political positions since 1999 to 2020 is not promising because it is increasing very slowly despite the emphasis of achieving gendered political representation. Majority of respondents accounting to 84.62 percent of all respondents have never contested and those who contested counted 0 percent in 1999/2000 and 3.08 percent in both 2004/2005 and 2009/2010 national elections, it raised in 2014/2015 national election to 5.38 percent and dropped to 03.85 percent in 2019/2020 national elections. These results do not show the possibility of achieving gender parity in political representation due to low trend of women involvement in contesting for political positions.

The results relate with the feminist legal theory which contends that the social structure and laws have historically placed women under men. Also, Onwa & Nwogbaga (2019) studied political participation in 2015 general election of Nigerian and found that marginalization of women was manifested in politics in Nigeria where men used several strategies to alienate women from participating in politics. Similarly, Adamu (2023) study in Nigeria on Women participation in politics examined the challenges and prospects to Nigerian democracy. The study revealed that the representation of women was generally low compared to that of men and there were several barriers for such problem including cultural, economic and legal amongst others that have affected the participation of women in politics

### **The Trend of Representation of Women for Village Chair Persons Positions**

The study used the documentary review method to get real data on the trend of women's political representation for the village chairperson position in the last five-year terms of leadership in respect of the past five national elections since the year 2000. The collected data are pictorially presented here:

#### **Bar Chart 1: The Trend of Representation of Women for Village Chair Persons Positions**



**Source:** Field data, (2024)

Based on the data extracted from existing documents and information systems village chairperson position have been holding by men at 100 percent in five-year terms of the elections cycle since that of the year 2000-2004 up to the year 2005-2009. In year 2010 to 2014 only 98.6 percent were men and 1.4 percent out of the total village chairpersons in Ileje District. In this case, village chairperson position experiencing underrepresentation of women. Out of 71 villages only one national electoral cycle elected a female to be their village chairperson and last only for five-year term.

From year 2015 to 2024 there were no women elected in general national election to head the villages in Ileje district. This trend is alarming and achieving gender parity in chairperson political position remain a big puzzle despite the existing democratic electoral system. These results conform to feminist legal theory which assumes that historical subordination of women is a result of laws which have put men – women dichotomy by positioning men at superior position against women in social, economic and political spheres of human life (Wandaka, 2019). With this theory men are positioned at superior level than women something which directly affect the achievement of gender parity in political

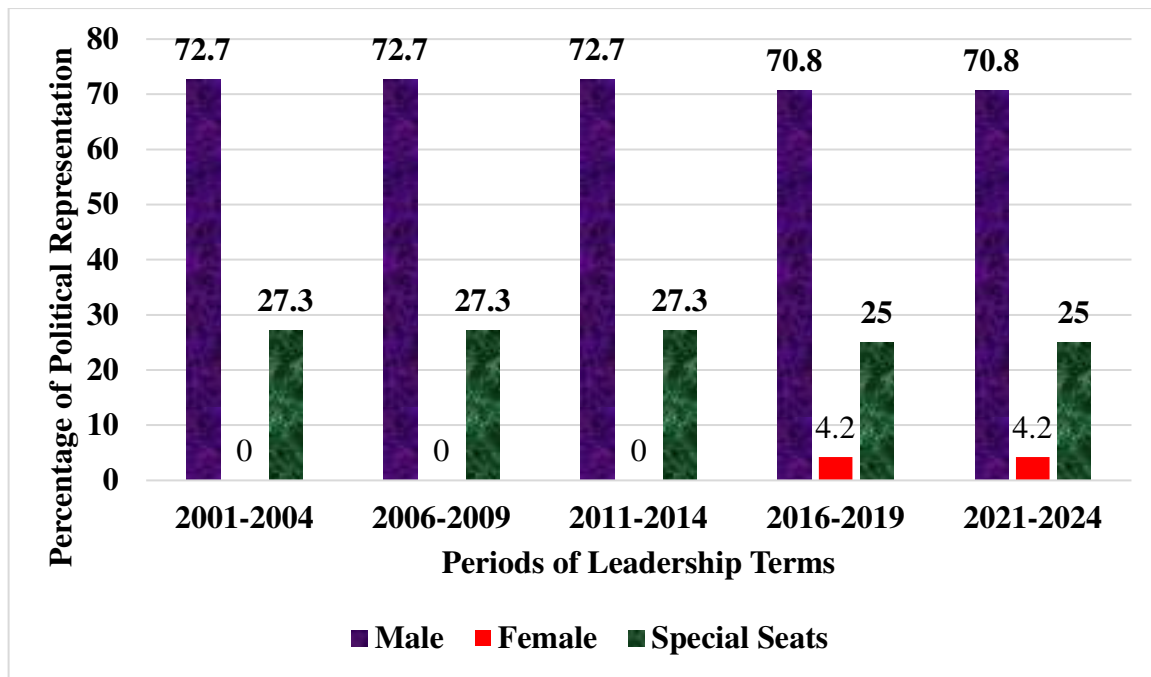


leadership. The results relate with those found by different scholars, for example Iyeshim (2023) found that Women are underrepresented despite several efforts to achieve gender parity in Africa, the study points that there is high political inequality between men and women across several countries in Africa.

### The Trend of representation of women for Ward Councilors Positions

The study used documentary review method to get the data on the trend of women’s political representation for the ward councilors position in the last five terms of leadership in respect of five national elections since 2000. The collected data are pictorially presented here:

**Bar Chart 2: The Trend of Representation of Women for Ward Councilors Positions**



Source: Field data, (2024)

From the data presented women have been underrepresented in ward councillors’ political positions at Ileje District Council in the last five leadership terms since year 2000 general election. Throughout the last five terms of leadership since the year 2000 the women ward councilor counted less than 30% including those for special seats, when those for special seats are excluded the representation of women has counted zero (0%) for three leadership

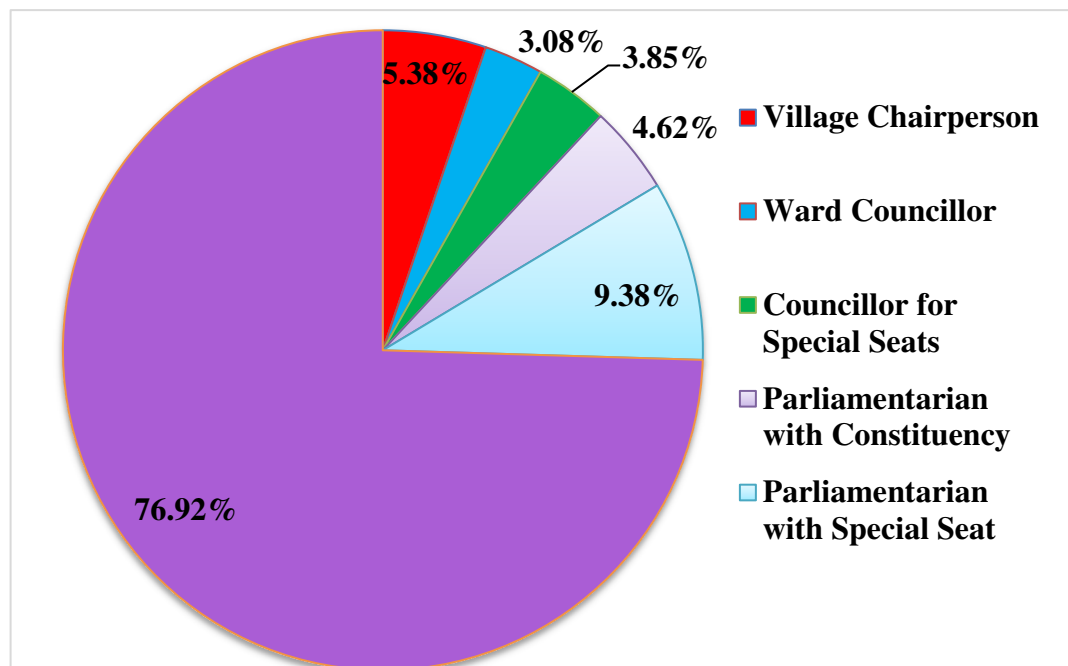


terms and only counted 4.2 percent in two recent general elections mainly in the year 2015 and 2020. This is a good positive move but the speed is very low to achieve gender parity in political leadership. These results of lower representation of women in ward councillors’ political positions conform to the feminist legal theory, particularly the radical feminism part which sees society as patriarchally structured to subordinate women. The radicals in addition argued that the law, state, and social institutions are all structured in the favour and interest of the male class against the women hence (Wandaka, 2019). In this context achieving parity in political leadership remains a big puzzle. This is why there was the introduction of special seats for women to avoid the council having only women but still the percentage of women is lower than expected.

### Future Prospect of Women’s Political Representation

Under this section, respondents were asked to tell if they were expecting to contest for any political position in the near future. The responses were captured and are presented in Pie Chart 1.

**Pie Chart 1: Future Prospect of Women’s Political Representation in Percentage (n=130)**







**Source:** Field data, (2024)

From the data of 130 women surveyed, the majority of women 76.92 percent were not expecting to contest for any political position in the future that is to say only 25.08 percent of women were expecting to contest for political positions in the future. Among women expecting to contest for political positions, the majority counting to 9.38 percent opted to contest for parliamentarians with special seats in their future life. These results imply that the future prospect of women's political representation is not as promising as expected although the presence of special seats for women in political positions is noted to help in pushing up the percentage of women's political representation. However, the achievement of gendered political representation is not promising shortly as future representation of women is estimated to be not more than 30 percent if all factors remain constant. These results shows that higher representation of women in political positions does not having a bright future as expected, this trend conform to the feminist legal theory of radical feminism which sees society as patriarchally structured to subordinate women. Wandaka, (2019) adds that the theory argued that the law, state, and social institutions are all structured in the favour and interest of the male class against the women hence expecting to achieve gender parity in political positions in the near future remains a big mystery.

## **Conclusion**

However, in conclusion, the study findings on women's participation in political positions show that the majority of women account for 84.62 percent out of total women respondents have never contested for any political position and only 15.38 percent have contested for political position, while there is no any woman contested for a parliamentary position with constituency over the stated period. Based on the year of elections conducted from 1999 to 2020, the study shows that 84.62 percent of all respondents have never contested in any general election conducted over the period and only 15.38 percent out of the total respondents contested in the general election, this indicates that trend of women's political representation in general national election is weak to achieve gender parity in political representation.



For the five-year terms of election cycle from 2000 to 2024 men dominated the village heading except in year five-year term election of 2010 to 2014 where one woman was elected as a village chairperson which was 1.4 percent of the total village chairpersons from 71 villages found in Ileje district, this implies the underrepresentation of women in heading a village. While regarding future prospect of women's political participation and representation was generally not promising as majority of women had no any plan to participate as political contestant in their near future.

Furthermore, the study finding shows that for an election conducted from 2001 to 2014 the number of ward councillors in the district is very low, and women for the period of 2001-2004, 2006-2009 and 2011-2014 were holding a position of Ward Councillors basing on the special seats given as per Tanzanian constitution. In year 2016-2019 and up to year 2021-2024 women contested for post and head the Ward Councillors position, this show that women are underrepresented in ward councillors' political position at Ileje District Council. The study findings further show that, 76.92 percent of total women respondents are not expecting to contest for any political position in future and only 25.08 percent of the respondents are expecting to contest for political positions in future include contesting for parliamentary posts at the general election and with special seats within a constituency in coming elections, this imply that future prospect of women's political representation is not promising.

### **Recommendations**

The study recommends more efforts to achieve good number of women's political participation and representation while paying clearly on nature of men-women dichotomy in social, political and biological relations. The challenges hindering women's political participation and representation should be worked out and eradicated while leaving the nature of men – women relation to take part rather than forcing solutions in achieving gender parity in political leadership in the country. The emphasis on political participation should be given to women from the family level up to national level, to ensure improvement in women participation in the country's political environment within the country.





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