



## Shaping Political Identity through Gender-Based Principle: A Comparative Review of Women Participation in State Politics Between the Philippines and Vietnam

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines how gender-based principles and norms contribute to women's political identity and participation in the Philippines and Vietnam with contrasting rankings in the 2024 Global Gender Gap Report despite their geographical proximity. The study used a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews with five purposively selected participants and systematic review following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis of interview transcripts and content analysis of relevant sources and policy documents from 2018-2024. Findings revealed that there is a disparity between the two nations' acknowledgment of gender-based principles. While Vietnam shows limited public awareness of women's political engagement despite meeting the United Nation's 30% benchmark for women in parliament, the Philippines exhibits more informed discourse on women's political participation despite falling short of global standards. Findings suggests that legal frameworks alone are insufficient for advancing women's political participation. To have meaningful progress, it requires a multi-dimensional strategy that simultaneously addresses cultural norms, strengthens enforcement mechanisms, and dismantles entrenched gender stereotypes.

### RESUMO

Este estudo examina como os princípios e normas de gênero contribuem para a identidade política e a participação das mulheres nas Filipinas e no Vietnã, países com classificações contrastantes no Relatório Global de Desigualdade de Gênero de 2024, apesar da proximidade geográfica. O estudo utilizou uma abordagem qualitativa, com entrevistas semiestruturadas com cinco participantes selecionadas intencionalmente e uma revisão sistemática seguindo a estrutura PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses). Os dados foram analisados por meio de análise temática das transcrições das entrevistas e análise de conteúdo de fontes relevantes e documentos de políticas públicas do período de 2018 a 2024. Os resultados revelaram uma disparidade no reconhecimento dos princípios de gênero entre as duas nações. Enquanto o Vietnã demonstra uma limitada conscientização pública sobre o engajamento político das mulheres, apesar de atingir a meta de 30% de mulheres no parlamento estabelecida pelas Nações Unidas, as Filipinas exibem um discurso mais informado sobre a participação política feminina, embora não alcancem os padrões globais. Os resultados sugerem que os marcos legais, por si só, são insuficientes para promover a participação política das mulheres. Para que haja progresso significativo, é necessária uma estratégia multidimensional que aborde simultaneamente as normas culturais, fortaleça os mecanismos de aplicação da lei e desmantele os estereótipos de gênero arraigados.

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## Introduction

The advancement of women's empowerment has fundamentally transformed the modern world. Gender-based principles now play a crucial role in societal movements concerning women's active political participation, and states increasingly recognize this as both a significant concern and a key indicator of human development. Hunt (2020) as cited by Shinbrot et al. (2019) and Patel et al. (2020) demonstrates that women leaders have pioneered sustainable development and humanitarian policies, marking substantial progress in this field.

Despite these achievements, women continue to face significant barriers that restrict their socioeconomic, humanitarian, and political rights (Sinpeng and Savirani, 2022). This challenge is particularly evident in Southeast Asia (Choi, 2018), where women's empowerment has emerged as a critical issue requiring urgent attention. The situation presents an interesting paradox, while Southeast Asia has outpaced Western countries in certain aspects of women's empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2020), the region's overall progress toward gender equality has stagnated. This stagnation necessitates a closer examination of women political leaders' presence in Southeast Asia.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has adopted several resolutions to empower women in the region. These initiatives include the 1988 Declaration of the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region and the establishment of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women. By 2017, ASEAN had achieved significant progress in its Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda by producing a Joint Statement on Promoting the WPS Agenda (ASEAN, 2022). This statement serves as an acceleration framework for ASEAN's existing policies on gender equality and women's empowerment. However, ASEAN's current approach to women's affairs remains inadequate. The organization has demonstrated a pattern of deprioritizing women's issues in critical areas.

Davies et al. (2014) observes that ASEAN Summits have notably excluded women from security discussions, despite the vital importance of women's perspectives in these contexts. The Joint Statement's use of "promotion" rather than more decisive language such as "implementation" further reflects this tentative approach (Ammar, 2020) and despite decades of motions and forums addressing women's issues, ASEAN has yet to exercise its legal capacity to develop a comprehensive Regional Action Plan (RAP) that could effectively guide Member States' National Action Plans (NAPs).

Vietnam and the Philippines presents a striking contrast when examining the 2024 Global Gender Gap Index. In the said report, the Philippines ranked 25th among 146 countries (World Economic Forum, 2024). Despite this impressive ranking and exhibited upward trajectory on women's political representation, the country remains below the global 30%

standard. Following the 2022 elections, women hold 26.2% of national parliament seats and 29.1% of positions in local governments (Philippine Commission on Women, 2024).

While for more than a decade, Vietnam has emphasized gender equality policies, leading to increased women's representation in politics across various administrative levels (United Nations Women, 2021). While Vietnam ranks lower at 72nd in the 2024 report, Vietnamese women hold 30.26% of parliamentary seats, successfully meeting the UN's global standard (World Economic Forum, 2024; Vietnam Law and Legal Forum 2024; Vietnam+ VietnamPlus, 2025).

These contrasting outcomes between overall gender gap rankings and actual political representation reveal a compelling paradox. A country with a higher overall gender equality ranking may still struggle with women's political participation, while another nation with a lower ranking can achieve meaningful representation in government. This situation suggests that comprehensive gender equality progress requires targeted attention to specific areas, particularly political leadership, rather than relying solely on aggregate measures of gender parity.

Hence, this study examined the current reality of women's political identity in both Vietnam and the Philippines while identifying the prevailing factors that constitute and contribute to women's political identity in these respective countries. Through this comparative analysis, the research addresses several interconnected dimensions of women's political engagement by exploring how state-recognized gender-based principles shapes political participation, with particular focus on women's political identity as evidenced by the cases of the women in Vietnam and the Philippines. Gender-based framework allows for a nuanced understanding of how gender operates within different political contexts, revealing both the universal aspects of women's political experiences and the country-specific factors that create unique opportunities and obstacles for political participation (Subrat Sarangi et al., 2023; Parpart et al., 2000).

## **Materials and Methods**

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the experiences and personal narratives surrounding women's political identity. Qualitative methodology proved particularly suitable for examining the complex factors that contribute to both challenges and progress in women's political participation, as it allows researchers to capture societal realities through participants' own perspectives and understanding (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection method, providing the necessary flexibility to gather in-depth participant insights while maintaining alignment with the study's core objectives. This approach enabled adaptive questioning during interviews,

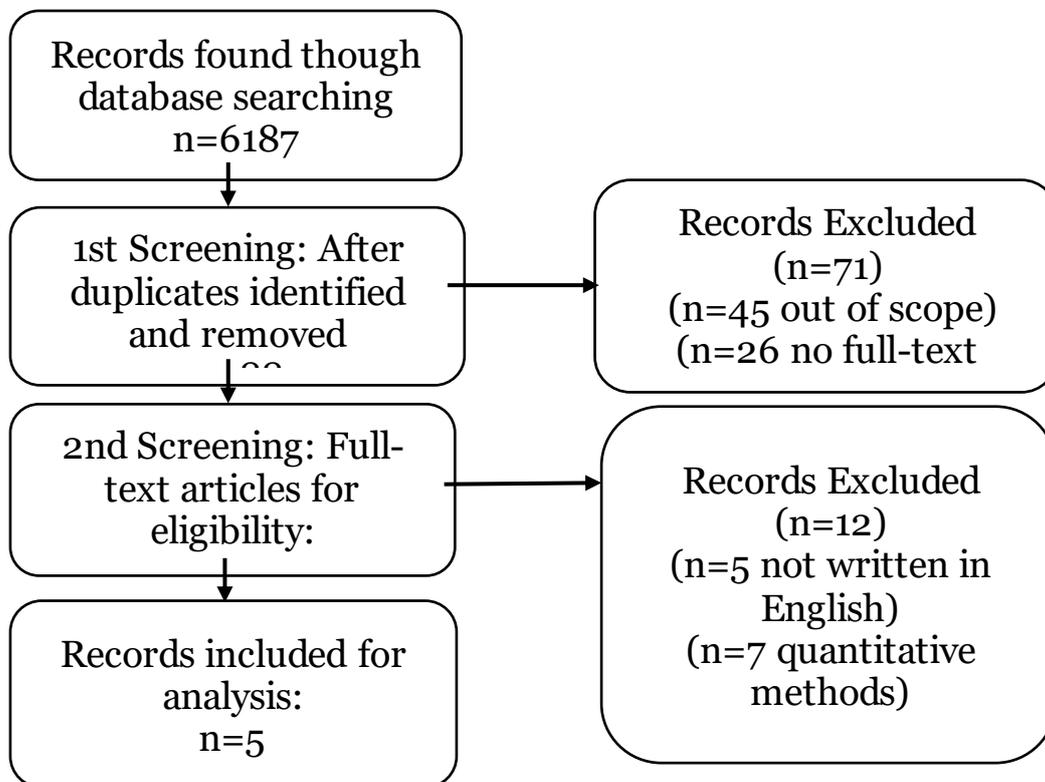
allowing researchers to explore emerging themes while focusing on factors that shape women's political identity (Ruslin et al., 2022).

The interview guide featured open-ended questions developed from related research and centered on recurring themes in the literature. Prior to implementation, a peer validator with research expertise reviewed and validated the finalized interview guide. The study utilized purposive sampling to target participants with specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Lavrakas, 2011). Selection criteria required participants to be women aged 18 or older who were citizens of either the Philippines or Vietnam.

Vietnamese participants conducted interviews in English due to the researcher's language limitations. This approach yielded a sample of five participants: three Filipino women and two Vietnamese women. Strict ethical standards governed participant recruitment and involvement. All potential participants received comprehensive briefing of the study's nature, data collection procedures, data management protocols, and potential publication of results. This transparency enabled participants to make fully informed decisions about their involvement. All participants provided recorded consent before proceeding with online interviews conducted through Zoom with careful attention to privacy protection. Following interview completion, all recordings underwent manual transcription and coding to ensure participant anonymity.

**Figure 1.**

*PRISMA framework for Systematic Review*



The study employed thematic analysis to contextualize participant insights and understand the dynamics of women's political identity across both countries. Additionally, document analysis utilized the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) framework for data screening. Although originally designed for medical research, PRISMA has gained recognition for its comprehensive approach and broad applicability across academic disciplines (BMJ, 2021). The framework's four-phase flow diagram provided the necessary objectivity, accuracy, and transparency throughout the document analysis process.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Women's Political Identity in Vietnam***

#### ***Limited Public Awareness and Recognition: Gap Between Legal Framework and Practical Implementation***

Both respondents demonstrated notable hesitation when discussing women's presence in politics. While they readily offered insights about women in entrepreneurship and social work, their responses became constrained and uncertain when the conversation shifted toward women's political identity. This pattern revealed two conflicting subthemes: although both respondents acknowledged insufficient awareness of women's political identity, they also recognized Vietnam's efforts to nurture this area.

VN1 noted that Vietnam was not "anywhere worse than Korea" regarding women's political identity, suggesting an implicit awareness of ongoing development efforts despite limited visibility. Also, the respondents consistently expressed dissatisfaction with their limited knowledge of Vietnam's policies and the low visibility of politicians they were expected to vote for.

As VN2 explained, "the ignorance of the policy maker and the implementer" represented the primary factors constraining their political knowledge. Notably, VN2 repeated the phrase "I don't know" five times throughout the interview, underscoring the significant knowledge gap. This pattern indicates that while the concept of "modern women" exists in Vietnam, meaningful opportunities for women's political participation remain limited.

Vietnam's current government ensures women enjoy equal constitutional rights with men (Vu et al., 2017). The country has implemented policies allocating specific percentages of parliamentary seats to women and ratified international treaties protecting women's rights (Munro, 2013). Despite this robust legal framework designed to nurture women's political identity, significant visibility challenges persist. This disconnect between policy intention and public awareness suggests that Vietnam struggles to effectively communicate its political

affairs to constituents. While gender equality remains a stated goal, the translation of these policies into meaningful public engagement appears inadequate.

### ***Traditional Gender Roles and Contradictory Campaigns as Systemic Barriers***

The persistence of Confucian perspectives fundamentally shapes Vietnam's gender-based principles, defining women primarily as homemakers and secondary to men. This traditional framework extends directly into the political arena, where voters expect female candidates to demonstrate excellence as homemakers while simultaneously performing as capable policymakers (Vu et al., 2017). These expectations place women at a disadvantage in traditionally masculine fields such as politics, military affairs, international relations, and economics (Oxfam in Vietnam, 2016). In addition, voters in Hanoi view men as more politically knowledgeable and suitable for leadership roles than women (Hien & Tuan, 2022).

This perception not only minimizes women's political visibility but also portrays female politicians as either inadequate for substantive policy discussions or lacking in authority. The result is a systematic reduction in credibility that affects how women's political identity is perceived and valued. Since the early 20th century, Vietnam has promoted women's participation in nation-building through the "Socialist Womanhood" campaign, which encouraged women to "do all things and do all things well."

The "Five Goods" campaign specifically called for women to become leaders, follow laws, pursue education, meet production goals, and raise families (Vu et al., 2017). While intended to promote women's societal roles as government partners, this campaign created an unrealistic standard requiring women to excel simultaneously in both political participation and traditional domestic responsibilities.

The campaign's effects proved counterproductive when combined with persistent Confucian philosophy. Rather than liberating women for political engagement, these competing demands created additional burdens that made political participation even more challenging. As VN1 noted, women continue struggling with family affairs, making political engagement seem distant and unattainable.

Still, women's underrepresentation in politics leads to reduced visibility, which in turn reinforces stereotypes about their political capabilities. Female politicians often find themselves confined to areas perceived as "feminine," such as social welfare and education, while being excluded from "masculine" domains including military affairs, state security, and international relations (Vu et al., 2017). Even when women do participate in these areas, their expertise faces systematic doubt (Huong & Thuc, 2020). This pattern creates a concerning feedback loop where limited representation breeds further invisibility. VN2 exemplified this

phenomenon by mentioning a female politician she could only remember vaguely, demonstrating how women's political identities become lost to public memory.

### ***Women's Political Identity in the Philippines***

Women's political identity in the Philippines presents a complex landscape of advancement shadowed by enduring struggles. Interview responses reveal sophisticated understanding among participants, who articulated both the progress made and the systemic barriers that continue to constrain women's political participation. This analysis reveals that while women's political identity in the Philippines has gained recognition, it remains vulnerable to deeply embedded patriarchal structures and inadequate policy implementation.

### ***Media Representation in Women Politics***

In the Philippines, media serves as both catalyst and constraint for women's political identity. As PH2 emphasized, media functions as "a double-edged sword" in this context. While media coverage can elevate women's political visibility, it simultaneously perpetuates gender stereotypes that undermine their credibility. According to Encinas-Franco and Laguna (2023), media coverage consistently reinforces traditional gender roles by focusing on women politicians' identities as mothers, homemakers, and sisters rather than their political capabilities. This approach introduces conservative dialogues into the political arena that diminish women's professional standing. Questions about balancing motherhood with political responsibilities, for instance, reduce women's political identity to traditional concepts of womanhood while rarely subjecting male politicians to similar scrutiny. As noted by Philippine Commission on Women (2020) identified these gender stereotypes as a primary factor in the diminishing presence of women in politics. Such media representation preserves existing biases and damages the formation of robust women's political identity.

### ***Embedded Patriarchal Structures***

The persistence of patriarchal systems creates fundamental obstacles to women's political participation. Despite legal frameworks promoting gender equality, entrenched beliefs continue to shape public perception. Encinas-Franco (2021) found that Filipinos still predominantly view men as superior political leaders, a sentiment confirmed by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) survey data showing that 99.5% of Filipinos maintain this perspective (Chi, 2023). These gender-based principles foster what the Philippine Commission on Women (2020) terms "sexist undertones" in Philippine politics, where masculine traits remain the primary measure of political competence. This environment encourages masculinist campaigns that actively discourage women's political engagement, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of underrepresentation. Also, the concept of "Multiple

Burden" further compounds these challenges as women face expectations to fulfil traditional domestic responsibilities while pursuing political, economic, and social activities (Ida, 2000). This multiplicity of roles creates practical barriers to political participation and reduces women's overall representation in the political sphere.

### ***Policy Implementation Gaps***

While the Philippines possesses comprehensive legal frameworks supporting women's political rights, implementation remains inadequate. Participants expressed frustration with this disconnect as PH1 characterized existing laws as "unfair" and "too broad," while PH2 captured the essence of the problem: "The laws are there, but the implementation, the way that we execute it or serve it in our country, I think that's where the performance lacks." PH3 argued that effective policies encouraging women's political engagement remain absent, supporting Marcelino's (2023) that adequate female parliamentary representation remains a distant goal. This gap between policy intention and practical application undermines the potential for meaningful advancement in women's political identity.

### ***Representation and Visibility Challenges***

The struggle for authentic representation extends beyond mere presence to meaningful participation. As Encinas-Franco (2021) highlighted the critical lack of sex-disaggregated data, which exacerbates women's political invisibility. Without comprehensive data representation, women's issues become marginalized in policy-making processes, creating a cycle where their concerns remain unaddressed and their political identity underdeveloped. This data gap maintains what participants described as ineffective voicing of women's political affairs. While women may be visible in Philippine politics, their substantive representation and ability to influence political discourse remain constrained (Labonne et al., 2021). PH3 emphasized the need for dedicated spaces where women can nurture their political awareness and identity, suggesting that current platforms remain insufficient.

### ***Resilience and Positive Recognition***

Despite these challenges, women's political identity demonstrates remarkable persistence. Participants spoke positively about prominent female leaders, with PH1 specifically citing and praising former Vice President Leni Robredo and late President Cory Aquino. This recognition indicates that while challenges and barriers persist, individual women have successfully challenged traditional expectations and established meaningful political identities. In addition, the concept of modern womanhood, as articulated by all participants, centers on exercising political rights and engaging meaningfully in public discourse of the cited women in public government. This perspective suggests that Filipino

women increasingly view political participation as integral to their identity, even as they navigate constraints.

## **Conclusion**

The comparative analysis of women's political identity in Vietnam and the Philippines reveals compelling nuances, both countries maintain exemplary legal frameworks promoting gender equality, they simultaneously struggling with persistent implementation gaps that constrain meaningful women's political participation. While both states show a disconnect between policy intention and practical application, where constitutional guarantees and international treaty ratifications do not translate into visible political engagement. Traditional patriarchal structures are still deeply embedded in both societies, creating systemic barriers that reduce women's political credibility and confine them to stereotypically feminine policy domains.

The concept of "multiple burden" emerges as a critical constraint in both contexts, where women face unrealistic expectations to excel simultaneously in domestic responsibilities and political leadership roles. However, Vietnam's challenges appear more rooted in knowledge gaps and public awareness deficiencies, with respondents exhibiting hesitation and limited recognition of women's political contributions and the Confucian philosophy creates particularly rigid traditional gender role expectations that position women as secondary to men in political discourse.

In contrast, the Philippines shows more sophisticated public understanding of women's political identity, with participants articulating nuanced critiques of media representation and policy implementation failures.

Filipino respondents also expressed greater recognition of prominent female political leaders, suggesting a more developed discourse around women's political capabilities. Hence, the findings shows that while legal frameworks provide necessary foundations for women's political participation, they prove insufficient without corresponding cultural shifts, effective implementation mechanisms, and sustained efforts to address deeply embedded gender stereotype structures.

Both nations require targeted interventions to bridge the gap between policy intention and practical reality to achieve meaningful advancement in women's political identity and representation.

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