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**EMPOWERING CHANGE: EXAMINING THE DETERMINANTS OF WOMEN'S
POLITICAL PERCEPTIONS IN GUINEA-BISSAU**

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws from a 2018 opinion poll, *Vozes do Povo*, to lead an incursion into the intricate context of gender equality and women's political participation in Guinea-Bissau. The findings disclose that, while there is a gender gap in political perceptions, there is no intrinsic gender differences in understanding but rather a gap in political knowledge that taints women's perspectives of power structure's dynamics in Guinea-Bissau.

Keywords: Development Economics, Gender, Guinea-Bissau, Political Knowledge, Political Participation, Women Empowerment

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1. Introduction

Empowering women in politics is not just a matter of principle, but a fundamental necessity to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN Women 2023). However, global data clearly shows that women are still underrepresented in decision-making positions. As of January 1st, 2023, there were only 34 women in the highest positions of power in 31 countries, revealing a glaring gender gap. At the current rate, it is expected to take another 130 years for gender parity to be achieved in these influential positions (UN Women 2023). These statistics emphasize the urgent need to address the dynamics of women's political participation, not only for Guinea-Bissau, but also for the global discourse. The rationale for this need lies in the transformative potential that the inclusion of women in political leadership positions offers to society at large.

The importance of women's political participation is underscored by compelling evidence. Studies show that, when women are strongly represented in politics, there is a noticeable shift in resource allocation: for example, female leaders tend to direct investments towards public goods such as clean drinking water and critical infrastructure (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004). In addition, women in political office are more likely to advocate for policies and initiatives that directly impact women's well-being, such as child care services (Bratton and Ray 2002). Furthermore, the presence of women at policy councils fosters an environment of innovation, particularly in areas of critical importance to women (Bratton and Ray 2002). This means that the inclusion of women in decision-making bodies leads to policies that are more responsive to women's unique challenges. This evidence makes it clear that the composition of political bodies has a direct impact on policy outcomes and that the inclusion of women is a critical factor in bringing about positive change. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of women's political participation in Guinea-Bissau, is not only important for the country, but has broader implications for the global discourse on gender equality in politics.

This thesis will contribute to fostering women's political participation by examining political dynamics for women in Guinea-Bissau, based on the data retrieved from the Vozes do Povo opinion poll from 2018. The initial part of the paper is devoted to the context of Guinea-Bissau, where political history, gender equality, and women's political participation will be examined. Further ahead, the focus will be on the critical determinants of political perceptions, that play a central role in ensuring effective democratic representation and promotion of good governance. The findings reveal that, while there is a gender gap in political perceptions, it is not driven by gender differences in understanding, but rather by a gap in political knowledge that affects how women view political events in Guinea-Bissau.

2. Context

This chapter addresses the multi-layered context of gender equality and women's political participation in Guinea-Bissau. The West African country offers a unique backdrop characterized by rich cultural diversity, significant socioeconomic challenges and a history marked by political instability. Understanding this context is essential for exploring the complex dynamics that shape women's political engagement in Guinea-Bissau.

2.1. Guinea-Bissau Country Profile

Guinea-Bissau is a small West African country, bathed by the Atlantic Ocean, with an extremely rich and diverse culture. The population of Guinea-Bissau amounts to a total of 2.105.566 individuals (World Bank 2022), the majority being concentrated in the capital city of Bissau, and GDP per capita is around 775.8\$ (World Bank 2022). The country counts with over 20 different ethnic groups, the most prevalent ones being the Fulas, Balantas, Mandingas, Papeis and Manjacos, and, the three main religions are Islam, the most professed, Animism and Christianity. Although the country's official language is Portuguese, Creole is the most spoken

one and figures as a unifying factor within the country's different ethnic groups. The economy of Guinea-Bissau is extremely reliant on the export of cashew nuts, agriculture being the most important economic activity. In 2021, Guinea-Bissau ranked 177th out of 191 countries on the Human Development Index, with a score of 0.483, which is classified as low human development (UNDP 2022a).

Guinea-Bissau is currently one of the least developed countries in the world, despite its resource abundance and advantageous geographic location and climate (African Development Bank Group 2015). Its history has been tainted by a long saga of military coups and extensive political instability, which have driven the country to a permanent state of poverty and food insecurity, combined with a lack of basic infrastructure, government services and, overall, state capacity (African Development Bank Group 2015). This context is particularly burdensome on the female population, whose gender-specific roles place them at the end of the resource accessibility chain. Long-established gender discrimination in the country affects all spheres of life and is sustained by an absence of structural government action (African Development Bank Group 2015).

2.2. Political History of Guinea Bissau

For 500 years, the Republic of Guinea-Bissau was under the ruling of its colonizing country, Portugal. And while Portugal did not show much interest in political leadership for most of that period, that changed with the rise to power of António Oliveira Salazar. The Portuguese dictator entrenched a brutal and unforgiving political control of the country, at a time where the term decolonization was already brought about in conversations (Urdang 1975).

In 1956, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) was founded, with Amilcar Cabral at its prow. They initiated their claim to independence by organizing peaceful protests, that were met with violence every time, which, in turn, triggered

a shift in the protester's approach. In 1963, the people of Guinea-Bissau launched an armed struggle against their colonizer, a process that would only come to an end in 1973, when the Republic of Guinea-Bissau unilaterally declared independence. While a number of countries recognized them as a sovereign state at that stage, only in September 1974, after the Carnation Revolution took place in Portugal, did the colonizing country sign the Protocol of Solemn Recognition of Guinea-Bissau (RTP 2023).

The decolonization process left a trail of politically inexperienced individuals within PAIGC's representatives, who came to embody the failed attempts at governing the country in the following decades (Mendes 2019). In 1994, the country opened the political arena to opposition, leaving the one-party system behind. The democratic transition, however, was not a smooth process, with a great many coup d'états setting off a permanent state of turmoil in the country (Mendes 2019). Particularly, in 1998, a military rebellion against the then president launched a full-fledged civil war, that strongly contributed to the devastation of an already debilitated economic and social state. From 2005 to 2009 the conflicts in the country had appeared to have come to a halt, international donations resumed, and the country showed signs of economic stability and social progress. That was until the military deposed the then prime-minister and, once again, the country went back to the underlying state of upheaval. The year of 2012 witnessed yet another military-ignited coup d'état, which was the final blow in pushing international funding partners to abandon the country (African Development Bank Group 2015). This resulted in a lack of funding for primary needs, with the government struggling to pay public salaries and deliver standard services. June 2013 marks the beginning of an intervention in the country, powered by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which aimed at ensuring the normal course of democratic elections, for a new legitimate government to be constituted (African Development Bank Group 2015).

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the systemic political instability that seems to best describe the state of Guinea-Bissau. IMF classifies the Republic of Guinea-Bissau has one of the most fragile states of the world, precisely due to its chronic history of conflict, kindling constant ruptures of the needed political stability for the country to develop (IMF 2015).

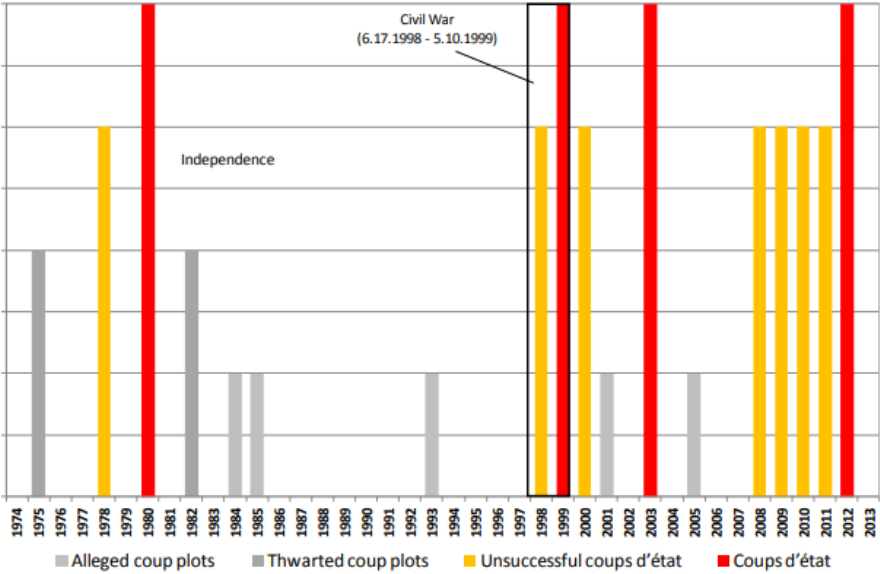


Figure 1 - Graphical Representation of Guinea-Bissau's Systemic Political Instability (1974-2013) (IMF 2015)

In the context of this work, it's important to highlight how women in Guinea-Bissau have been systematically sidelined by men in power and excluded from the country's history. Going back to the liberation movement days, it is crucial to underline the significance of women's efforts towards the country's common goals. Amilcar Cabral himself stated "we cannot have a successful revolution without the participation of women" (Urdang 1975) and these words were reflected in the party's program at the time. A party directive shared in early 1960s communicated "Defend women's rights, respect women (children, youth and adults) and make them respected; but convince the women of our country that their liberation should be their own achievement, by their work, attachment to the Party, self-respect, personality and steadfastness before everything that could be against their dignity" (Urdang 1975). The liberation war was a transformative time for women's perceived role in society in Guinea-Bissau and was accompanied by a change in mindset, that allowed for the extension of women's work in private

settings to more public spheres of life (de Barros and Semedo 2013). Women were taking space in many different dimensions of political life, for example, as political commissioners, *tabanca*¹ committee members, in the Superior Fight Council (*Conselho Superior de Luta*) and Executive Fight Committee (*Comité Executivo de Luta*), where they were included in decision-making (de Barros and Semedo 2013). After the war, village councils, created for organizing daily village life post-war, were even mandated to have at least two women within its five members, an illustrative sign of the importance of women's inclusion at the grassroots levels of political leadership.

Knowing the reality of women's political participation in the post-war years in Guinea-Bissau, it's all the more demoralizing to realize that this progress seems to have been lost in the country's current society. When Carmen Pereira, a Guinean political household name, stated that "In Guinea-Bissau we say that women must fight against two colonialisms. One against the Portuguese, the other against men" she was referring to a past of female subjugation that remains elucidative of Guinean women's current state of rights (Urdang 1975).

2.3. Gender Equality in Guinea-Bissau

After exploring the arduous path of women in Guinea-Bissau since independency, a more contemporary outlook on women's rights in the country is required. This includes an understanding of the status of gender equality in the West African country in general, and in the political arena in particular.

Firstly, it is noteworthy that gender equality efforts in Guinea-Bissau are hindered by a remarkable lack of reliable statistical data. Only 40% of SDGs' indicators for the country are measurable, with most baseline data missing. Action is needed to systematically collect and

¹ Guinea-Bissau's word for neighborhood, town, village.

enhance gender-sensitive data and to incorporate these components into national statistical production regulations (Embaló 2021).

More geographically limited measures, such as the 2019 African Gender Index, are used to compare Guinea-Bissau with other sub-Saharan African countries. The general classification shown in Figure 2.1 includes an economic dimension, a social dimension, and a representation and empowerment dimension. A score of 1 on this index would indicate full parity between men and women, while a score between 0 and 1 would indicate gender inequality in favor of men. The latter is the case for all African countries, with values ranging from 24% to 79.7% and an average of 48.6%. Guinea-Bissau is in the average range, which can be interpreted as a sign of relative consonance with the overall trend in the continent. The representation and empowerment component, which describes the differences between the number of men and women in leadership and representational positions, is particularly relevant in the context of this paper. The average for this component is 21.3%, which is again in line with Guinea-Bissau's position.

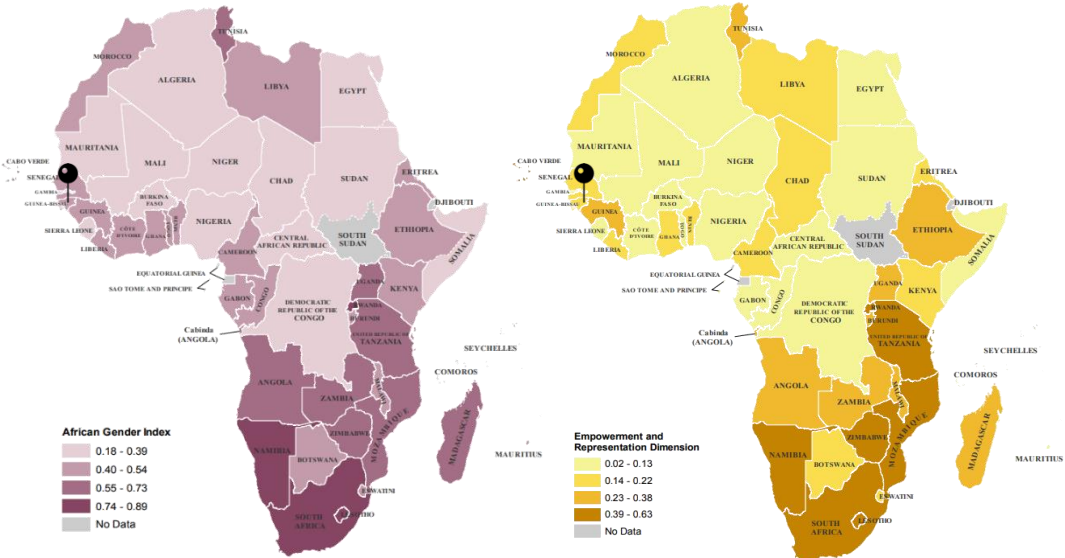


Figure 2 - Africa Gender Index. 2.1 - Overall Performance 2019. 2.2 - Representation and Empowerment Performance 2019 (African Development Bank Group 2019)

When zooming in on Guinea-Bissau, the sparse data that is actually available shows that gender inequality is most apparent in the following areas: sexual rights and violence, education, employment, and representation.

The highly harmful and dangerous practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is still widespread in Guinea-Bissau, with 52% of women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 having endured this practice, even if 75% of all women oppose it (MICS6 2021). Child marriage also remains prevalent, especially among girls, with 8.1% getting married before their 15th birthday and 25.7% before their 18th birthday, compared to only 0.8% of boys under 15 and 2.2% under 18 (MICS6 2021). Only 21.2% of women in Guinea-Bissau use contraceptives for family planning purposes and the birth rate is of 4.3 children per woman (aged 15-49) (MICS6 2021). Only about half of births take place in hospitals or medical centers, and the country has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in the world (MICS6 2021; World Bank 2020). All of this suggests that, in the area of sexual empowerment, violence, and sexual health, significant discrimination affects the lives of women in Guinea-Bissau.

In the education area, the gender gap is clearly visible: 40.2% of women and girls between 19 and 45 have not attended elementary school, compared to only about 19.8% of the male population (MICS6 2021). This is also reflected in a high illiteracy rate among women, which reaches almost 65%, and, in some rural areas, even goes up to 90% (MICS6 2021; DENARP II 2011).

Closely related to equal opportunities in education is the representation of women in the labor market. Only about 3.6% of women have a formal occupation, while the rest is almost exclusively employed in agriculture and the informal sector. Within agriculture, only 9.7% of women are formally paid, compared to 26% of the male population. Women and girls also bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work, spending an estimated two to ten times more hours on it than men (Ferrant, Pesando, and Nowacka 2014).

These figures provide an idea of the disparity between the living conditions of men and women in the Republic of Guinea-Bissau. All of the above factors play a role in the *status quo* of women's political participation in the country, which will be explored in the next section of this paper.

2.4. Female Political Participation in Guinea-Bissau

Power relationships in Guinea-Bissau are stamped by a culture of *matchundaadi*, an interesting concept to unravel in the context of this work. Embaló (2021) describes *matchundaadi* culture as “a set of values, behaviors, symbols and practices guided by a world view based on characteristics understood as typical of men and masculinities, in which the following stand out: exercise of strength (physical strength and symbolic strength), exaltation of courage and rebellion, intimidation (through fear and repression) and the exercise of violence (physical, institutional, political, social and symbolic)” (Embaló 2021). While this concept might, at first, seem relevant only for men in Guinea-Bissau, the truth is that this culturally entrenched belief legitimizes repressive hierarchies of control and domination, which are associated with the masculinization of all decision-making spaces in the country (Moreira 2017). Logically, it interferes with women’s relationship with political participation, not only by promptly dismissing them as inadequate to take on decision-making positions, but also by penetrating the country’s different hierarchies of power and weakening institutions’ normal functioning (Embaló 2021).

Joining the *matchundaadi* culture in the country, there is a series of other factors that explain women's *status quo* in the political arena in Guinea-Bissau. In Figure 3.1, some of the sociocultural dynamics that explain the limited political ambition of women in the West African country are pinpointed: lack of successful role models or opportunities, societal expectations and the rule of traditional models. In Guinea-Bissau, politics has a man's face and gender stereotypes are very restrictive on women. They are expected to carry submissive attitudes and self-exclude from political environments, as to support the men in their lives that do live up to the expectations of what a politician should look like (Interpeace and Voz di Paz 2018).

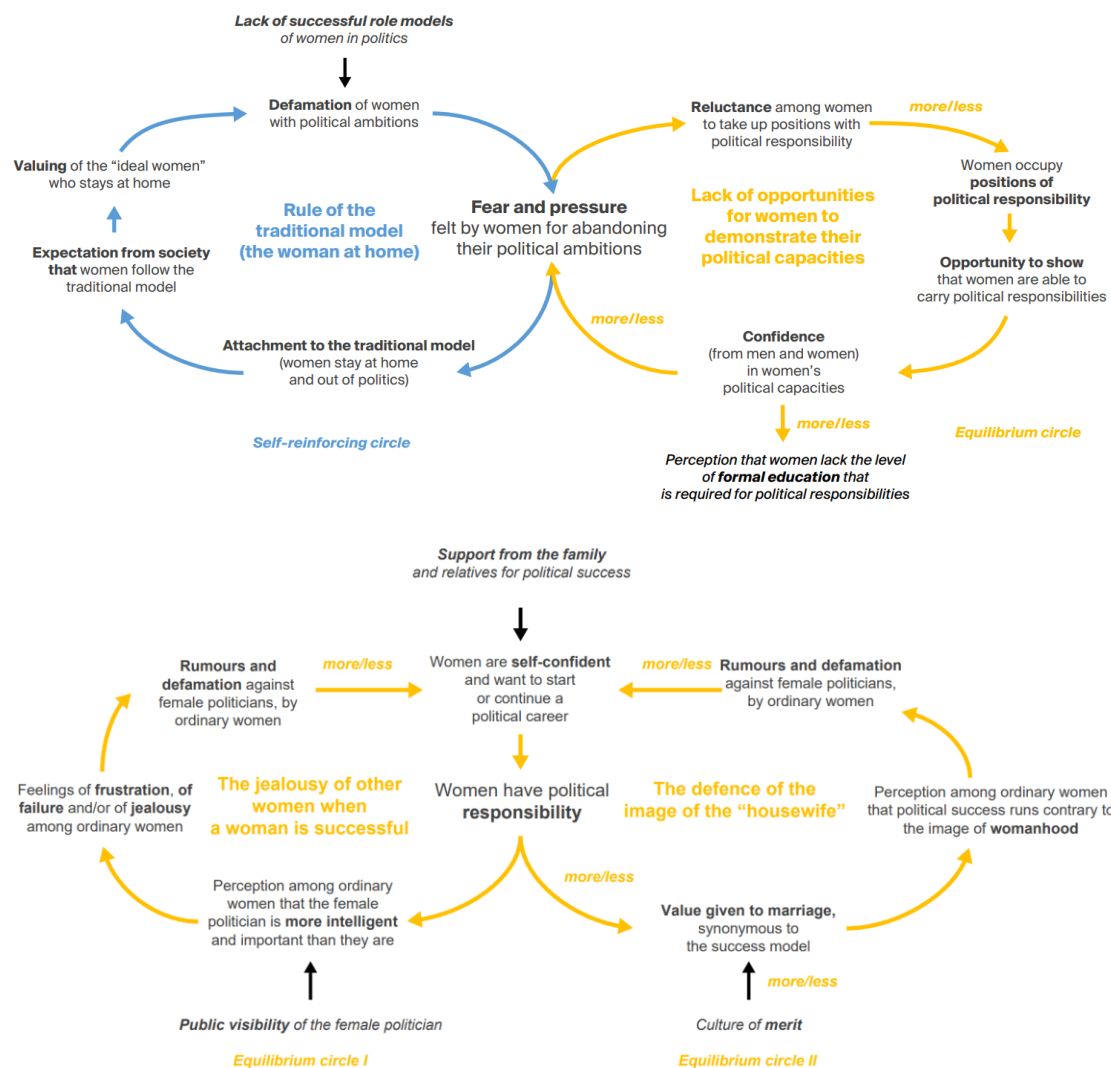


Figure 3 - 3.1 - Sociocultural Dynamics that Limit the Political Ambitions of Women. 3.2 - Depreciation of the Political Success of Women (Interpeace and Voz di Paz 2018)

Figure 3.2 puts forward other factors like female’s lack of self-confidence, mutual support and the value given to marriage. Traditional Guinean sayings such as *sufridur ta padi fidalgo* (“the ones who suffer are compensated”) or *mindjer ku seta kasamenti ta padi fidjus ku bali* (“women who accept to be sacrificed in their marriage have entrepreneurial and happy children”) are very illustrative of the expectations society holds for women (de Barros and Semedo 2013). If one does decide to counter those expectations, she is then faced with a lack of female solidarity, explained by feelings of low self-esteem that impede women from valuing each other (Interpeace and Voz di Paz 2018).

Legislative Term	Number of Women	Number of Men	Total Deputies	% of Women
1973-1976 (I)	10	110	120	8.3%
1976-1984 (II)	19	131	150	12.7%
1984-1989 (III)	22	128	150	14.7%
1989-1994 (IV)	30	120	150	20%
1994-1999 (V) ²	10	90	100	10%
1999-2004 (VI)	7	95	102	6.9%
2004-2008 (VII)	13	87	100	13%
2008-2012 (VIII) ³	10	90	100	10%
2014-2018 (IX)	14	88	102	13.7%
2019-2023 (X)	14	88	102	13.7%
2023-2027 (XI)	10	92	102	9.8%

Table 1 - Female Representation at Guinea-Bissau's People's National Assembly (ANP) (de Barros and Semedo 2013; Embaló 2021; IPU Parline 2023)

After a brief insight into the dynamics that determine women’s political participation in Guinea-Bissau, it’s time we get to know the numbers that materialize them. When it comes to

² First mandate of the transition to a multi-party system.

³ Between 2012 and 2014 the military took over the Republic of Guinea-Bissau.

representation at the People's National Assembly, in Table 1, we see how the percentage of women in parliament maxes out at 20%, an occurrence that, interestingly enough, took place in the last mandate of the one-party system. Meaning that, ever since becoming a democracy, the country hasn't been able to repeat that achievement. When it comes to integrating government, the maximum percentage of female ministers ever was 18,7% (de Barros and Semedo 2013; Instituto da Mulher e da Criança 2017). Women as secretaries of state averaged at 8.3% and as judges hit a ceiling at 28% (de Barros and Semedo 2013; Instituto da Mulher e da Criança 2017).

This gender gap persists despite legislative efforts to overcome it. Guinea-Bissau's constitution, in Articles 24 and 25, states that "all citizens are equal before the law, enjoy the same rights and are subject to the same duties, without distinction of race, sex, social, intellectual or cultural level, religious belief or philosophical conviction" (Liga Guineense dos Direitos Humanos 2013) and that "a man and a woman are equal before the law, in all domains of political, economic, social and cultural life" (Liga Guineense dos Direitos Humanos 2013). The country has also signed many international and regional conventions on gender equality, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol). Nationally, in 2011 and 2013, respectively, laws criminalizing FGM and Domestic Violence were passed. More recently, in 2018, a quota law mandating a minimum of 36% of female representation in elections or appointments to the National Assembly and Local Governments was unanimously approved (UNIOGBIS 2018). However, as we saw in Table 1, even after this law was passed, the percentage of female representation in parliament was always lower than the defined minimum threshold.

Despite these initiatives showing willingness to change the *status quo* in the country, civil society groups and activists claim that these laws haven't been disseminated, and that most women aren't even aware of their rights and wouldn't know how to act on them (African Development Bank Group 2015). The Women's Council, a coalition of civil society groups, is at the forefront of local initiatives to address these issues. They are formulating a common agenda to promote the political participation of women and young girls, that aims to counterattack the challenges they face with strategic action (UNDP 2022b). Within this agenda, three key strategies emerge: revising the parity law, mobilizing resources to address economic inequalities faced by women in campaigns, and focusing on reducing sociocultural barriers (UNDP 2022b).

Guinea-Bissau's efforts to promote women's political participation are not limited to policy changes. Advocacy initiatives, for example, are based on a collaborative approach that brings together traditional and religious leaders, women and youth groups, and representatives from different regions of the country. Focus groups involving women from the main political parties are used to raise awareness and engage them in the cause, with the goal of driving change within the parties themselves (UNDP 2022b). The UNIOGBIS Gender Unit and Political Department has conducted extensive training to identify barriers and opportunities for women's political participation and develop strategies to increase their involvement in political and decision-making processes (UNIOGBIS 2012). Despite the progress conquered by these initiatives, significant challenges remain around female political participation, and for gender equality in general.

3. The Vozes do Povo Survey

This analysis will use data presented in the Vozes do Povo survey, a research project designed to comprehensively assess social and political dynamics in Guinea-Bissau. The 2018

Guinea-Bissau opinion poll was conducted using the proven methodology of Afrobarometer, a renowned African opinion research network dedicated to creating comparable data for the African continent. This survey, conducted by an expert team assembled by the NGO DEMOS, included five key components to ensure scientific rigor and cross-national comparability (Carter and Cardoso 2023). To do so, the questionnaire drew primarily on the extensive work of Afrobarometer. It included a total of 340 questions, sub-questions and observations covering a wide range of topics, including living conditions, perceptions and opinions related to governance and society. The questionnaire was carefully crafted in both Portuguese and Creole. More than 90% of the surveys were conducted in Creole, with the remainder being conducted in various local languages by researchers proficient in these dialects (Carter and Cardoso 2023).

Careful design of the national sample involved collaboration with an experienced international consultant and the National Institute of Statistics of Guinea-Bissau. The sample design aimed to enroll 1,200 respondents strategically stratified by region, gender, and place of residence (urban or rural) across 150 districts of the country. The survey design included random sampling at multiple levels to give all citizens 18 years of age and older, an equal opportunity to participate in the survey (Carter and Cardoso 2023).

EMPOWERING CHANGE: EXAMINING THE DETERMINANTS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PERCEPTIONS IN GUINEA-BISSAU

1. Introduction

One of the most remarkable achievements of 21st century politics is the increased female participation in public affairs and decision-making. However, this progress has reached different world regions at staggered velocities. Guinea-Bissau, our country of interest, is still lagging behind the majority of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a flagging distance between the *de jure* and the *de facto* country's stance on gender matters.

With the aim of contributing towards the literature on gender issues in Sub-Saharan African countries, this work will be focusing on political participation, an integral component of a healthy democracy. To do so, I'll be investigating political perceptions, political participation, and political knowledge variables, which are extremely relevant because, historically speaking, we know that those who are less politically engaged are also less prone to have their issues brought to the table. A healthy political scrutiny is reliant on active political participation because, only through these mechanisms, can citizens sanction their leaders for poor performances, propel desired development outcomes and encourage better-quality representatives (World Bank 2016).

The paper will be structured as follows: initially there will be a review of the existent literature on political participation, which will be followed by an overview of the deterrents to women's political involvement in Guinea-Bissau and of the political background for the year the *Vozes do Povo* opinion survey was conducted. Succeeding this will be the chapter on methodology, where all the actions taken to prepare the analysis will be listed and, finally, we'll get to know the results of the analysis. The conclusion will wrap up the findings and make sense of them within the previously presented context.

2. Literature Review

While the literature on gender gaps in political participation is comprehensive, it should be highlighted that the majority of these studies focuses on developed countries.

Research suggests that the process of socialization shapes women to be more passive, private, rule-abiding and compassionate, whereas that same process forges men to be leadership-oriented, autonomous and self-reliant (Brownmiller 1984; Fox and Lawless 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987). If kids are indeed brought up with different expectations, depending on gender (Fridkin and Kenney 2007; Hooghe and Stolle 2004), it's not surprising to find that they will show different levels of political interest in adulthood, especially when it's blatant that characteristics attributed to women do not coexist with those that politics usually entail in terms of individual character.

Gender gaps in political participation are also linked to persistent gendered differences in socioeconomic resources. Schlozman et al (1999) draw a straight positive connection between employment and political participation, for the United States, which means that financially constrained individuals are less likely to be politically engaged. Linking this finding to the fact that female poverty rates are higher than male's, for all regions of the world, in at least one poverty threshold (UN Women 2022), the conclusion that women are less likely to be politically engaged than men is very straightforward. On top of this, women are also severely more burdened with housework than men, which creates extra layers of unavailability of time to dedicate to politics (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 1997).

A different branch of the literature claims that, more than a gender gap in participation, there are a variety of gender gaps across different forms of participation. While men are overall more politically active than women, they are specifically more engaged in strikes, demonstrations, contacting political officials and being members of parties (Coffe and Bolzendahl 2011; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Marien, Hooghe, and Quintelier 2010), whilst

women favor petition-signing, political consumerism and donations, which can be perceived as more individualistic forms of participation (Burns 2007; Coffe and Bolzendahl 2011; Marien, Hooghe, and Quintelier 2010; Parry, Moyser, and Day 2011; Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley 2003).

To recapitulate, the literature shows that men, in general, are likely to be more politically active and informed than women, and both differences in bring up and in socioeconomic resources explain this gap. Additionally, women seem to prioritize more private forms of political participation. The pursuit for answers to the research questions motivating this paper revealed that women in Guinea-Bissau are also less politically active, less politically knowledgeable, and more likely to hold a distorted perception of the political events taking place in the country. This is an important contribution towards the less explored domain of gender gaps in political participation in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the findings are in line with the literature presented in this section.

3. Context

3.1. Deterrents to Women's Political Participation in Guinea-Bissau

Guinea-Bissau's relationship with gender equality is one of inconsistency. In previous chapters we have seen how women performed a fundamental role in the country's liberation war and how, theoretically, the country has set up the tools to make gender equality a reality. However, we have also seen the lack of female political representation, we have seen how women's living conditions are worse than men's and how an overarching culture of *matchundaadi* defines the rules with which the country runs itself.

When it comes to the political realm, the reality is not different. The report from Interpeace and Voz di Paz put it better: "In the political game, women play a limited role, far away from decision-making" (Interpeace and Voz di Paz 2018). This report puts forward a plethora of explanations for the political participation gender gap in Guinea-Bissau and offers a very

thorough diagnosis of the mechanisms preventing women from occupying their space in the political arena.

It all commences with funding. Any political initiative's success relies on funding and, especially during elections season, campaigning demands for large sums of money. The little money women do have to their names is devoted to essential needs and common-sense says it should not be diverted from the family's fund (Interpeace and Voz di Paz 2018). If women do raise enough funds to pursue their political ambitions, they are then confronted with a party system filled with patronage, flattery and clientelism, that pushes women to the margins of voting lists. Interpeace and Voz di Paz concluded that, the harder is it to mobilize the electorate, the greater the tendency to exclude women from party lists, as men have more economic power to obtain votes (Interpeace and Voz di Paz 2018). Because women have not yet been able to create their own network of influence, they are constantly relegated to trivial positions within parties (Interpeace and Voz di Paz 2018). Another important aspect is that women are simply not logistically able to dedicate time to their political interests since they spend their days fulfilling their social obligations. Bottom line, if all the previously mentioned problems were to go away, there would still be the ingrained and uninformed belief that men are biologically more prepared to take on political roles. While women fail to uphold each other, men will not hesitate in defending their peers. All of these factors contribute towards the perpetuation of the gender gap in political participation in Guinea-Bissau (Interpeace and Voz di Paz 2018).

3.2. Overview of Guinea-Bissau's Political State of Affairs

To comprehend the results further ahead, a sense of the political environment in Guinea-Bissau in 2018, when the *Voices do Povo* survey was conducted, is required.

Guinea-Bissau has a presidential political system, which, as we have formerly described, has a long history of instability. In 2014, after the 2012 military coup, the country was brought

back to a democratic state, but the shaky relationship between President José Mário Vaz and the government compromised the latter's room to maneuver. In 2018, after Prime-Minister Umaro Sissoco Embaló resigned, the President appointed a transitional government, without PAIGC's agreement, led by Artur Silva, which, once again, failed to gather parliamentary support. Finally, in April that year, the president nominated Aristides Gomes for Prime-Minister, the seventh to be appointed since President Vaz took office in 2014, with the parties consenting to this choice (Freedom House 2019).

Incidents reported during the year of 2018 point towards corrupt behavior and failure in law-abiding across-the-board. Monitoring groups divulged occurrences of intimidation and beatings of election officials and candidates during the election period, campaign spending control is weak, and vote-buying is recurrent. Elections set to take place in 2018 were postponed to 2019 due to a lack of funding, but some parties believe that irregularities took place in the stalled voter registration process (Freedom House 2019). Corruption among government constituents is prevalent and includes military and civilian officials, accused, on numerous occasions, of illegal drug trade. Oversight of public spending as a whole has been unfeasible due to the lack of political stability, with civil society organizations being very critical of the government's budget spending choices (Freedom House 2019).

As we now carry a more detailed image of both the *status quo* of gender equality and of the political landscape in Guinea-Bissau, it's time to set up the framework for the research motivating this paper.

4. Data and Methodology

In this next chapter, the approach to the research questions and the key variables to the analysis will be presented. The gender gap in political perceptions will be examined by looking into individual's perspectives on a series of indicators of the country's political *status quo*.

Then, the research will be taken further, with the creation of an interaction term between political activity and gender, for understanding the dynamics that justify the gap in perceptions.

4.1. Data

To reach the above-established targets, the chosen econometric model was ordinary least squares (OLS), which, due to its nature, will allow for establishing linear connections between variables. The *Vozes do Povo* survey provides a very rich database for a representative analysis of the country and, because it is an opinion survey, it perfectly fits the goal of this endeavor.

4.2. Models

The two main questions to be answered in this chapter are “Are there differences between men and women in how they perceive the political situation in Guinea-Bissau?” and, assuming the answer to this question will be “Yes”, then arises the question "Why are there differences in the assessment of the political situation?". To answer them, we'll be looking into two different models.

The first hypothesis corresponds to the claim that there is a gender gap in political perceptions in Guinea-Bissau and, to prove so, the following model will be used:

$$(1) Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{female} + \beta_2 \text{age} + \beta_3 \text{rural} + \beta_4 \text{i. education} + \beta_5 \text{i. ethnicity} + \beta_6 \text{i. religion} + \beta_7 \text{i. region} + \epsilon$$

Y_i will be replaced by different outcome variables, namely, *president_ignores_constitution*, *president_ignores_assembly*, *corrupt_percep_president*, *elections_fair_mediacoverage*, *elections_bribed_votes*, *personal_interests_politicians*, *perceived_democracy* and *understand_democracy*.

As for the second hypothesis, the claim is that, within women, there are specific factors influencing the perception of the country's political situation. To prove so, the following model will be used:

$$(2) Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 age + \beta_2 rural + \beta_3 i. education + \beta_4 i. ethnicity + \beta_5 i. religion + \beta_6 i. region + \beta_7 i. female * i. political_activity + \epsilon$$

Y_i will be replaced by the same outcome variables, but we now have the added interaction term between gender and political activity, which will provide insights into how political knowledge and engagement influence gendered perceptions of the political situation in Guinea-Bissau.

4.3. Variables

In the following section of the paper, the variables employed in the models will be listed. These were created based on questions from the *Voices do Povo* survey and adjusted for a more intuitive interpretation.

4.3.1. Outcome Variables

The variable *president_ignores_constitution* is a dummy that takes the value of 1 if the respondent considered that the president had ignored the constitution and the value of 0 if the respondent considered he had never done so. It gives us a look into the impression individuals have on the role of the country's president as a guarantor of constitution compliance.

The variable *president_ignores_assembly* is a dummy that takes the value of 1 if the respondent believed that the president had ignored the national assembly and the value of 0 if the respondent believed he had never done so. It gives us a look into the perception of the degree of mutual respect and interconnection between the two most important institutions in the

country.

The variable *corrupt_percep_president* is a dummy that takes the value of 1 when the respondent believed that the president or his advisors were involved in corruption schemes, and the value of 0 when they did not believe so. It provides an idea of how the president and his execution of the role are deemed by the country's nationals.

The variable *elections_fair_mediacoverage* is a dummy that takes the value of 1 when the respondent believed that the media provided fair mediatic coverage to all parties during elections, and the value of 0 when they did not believe so. It shows individuals' perception of the media's impartiality and fairness when covering elections in the country.

The variable *elections_bribed_votes* is a dummy that takes the value of 1 when respondents believed that voters were bribed during elections, and the value of 0 for when they did not believe so. Vote-buying is a common occurrence in the country, and it is important to know how aware are individuals on this occurrence.

The variable *personal_interests_politicians* is a dummy that takes the value of 1 for when respondents believed that politicians prioritized their personal interests over the country's common good, and the value of 0 otherwise. It's important to understand how individuals perceive the motivations behind politicians work in the country.

The variable *perceived_democracy* is a dummy that takes the value of 1 when respondents perceived the country to be a democracy, and the value of 0 when they did not. Individuals were asked to determine to what degree was their country a democratic state.

Finally, the variable *understand_democracy* is a dummy that takes the value of 1 for when people understood the concept of democracy, and the value of 0 when they did not. This variable was derived from an open answer question where individuals were asked to define the concept of democracy. Individuals were considered to not understand the concept when they weren't able to provide any answer or didn't recognize a meaning to the word "democracy".

While the first six outcome variables help build the image the respondent has of the country and their awareness of events taking place in the political arena, the last two variables start hinting at what might explain the disconnection some maintain with the reality of the country's political condition.

4.3.2. Explanatory Variables

The explanatory variable of most interest for this study is *female*, since we are trying to zoom in on the gender gap in political perceptions in Guinea-Bissau. This dummy variable is coded as 0 for male respondents and as 1 for female respondents. The other explanatory variable we will be looking into is *political_activity*, which is coded as 1 for individuals who were active members or official leaders of a political party or movement at the time of the survey, and as 0 for the ones who weren't.

4.3.3. Control Variables

To ensure a robust analysis of the determinants of women's political perceptions in Guinea-Bissau, a series of controls was used for both models - *age*, *rurality*, *education*, *ethnicity*, *religion*, and *region*. *Age* and *education* are continuous variables, while *rurality*, *ethnicity*, *religion*, and *region* are coded as dummies. These controls were selected as to avoid any potential confounding effects and will enhance the precision of the findings.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Gender Gap in Political Perceptions

Table 2 shows the results for the regressions specified in Model (1). As previously stated, this model had the intention to pin down any gender differences in political perceptions for several different indicators of the country's political situation. Within this bundle of outcome

variables, only for *elections_bribed_votes* did the regressions not yield a statistically significant result for gender.

Table 2: Gender Gap in Political Perceptions in Guinea-Bissau

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	President Ignores the Constitution	President Ignores the National Assembly	Perceive the President as Corrupt	Fair Media Coverage During Elections	Bribed Votes During Elections	Politicians Pursue Personal Interests	Perceive the Country as a Democracy	Understand the Concept of Democracy
Female	-0.0865*** (0.0306)	-0.0745** (0.0317)	-0.0550* (0.0315)	0.0885*** (0.0277)	-0.0503 (0.0308)	-0.0438** (0.0179)	0.0700** (0.0355)	-0.140*** (0.0319)
Observations	903	920	911	921	887	1,014	799	946

Notes: For each coefficient, the numbers in the round parentheses represent the robust standard errors. The p-values have been coded as the following: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Additional controls include age, a dummy for rurality, education, a dummy for ethnicity, a dummy for religion and a dummy for region.

When it comes to the assessment of the president's performance, we find that women are 8.7 p.p. less likely than men to believe that he ignores the constitution. A similar phenomenon happens for believing that the president ignores the national assembly's role, for women are 7.5 p.p. less likely than men to claim that this is the case. All in all, women are 5.5 p.p. less likely to perceive the president as corrupt. The overall conclusion one can take from these results is that women, in general, trust the president more than men, in Guinea-Bissau.

Focusing now on elections season, we know these periods can spawn tension, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of conflicts flaring in the country. Despite that, women are 8.9 p.p. more likely than men to believe that the media justly covers all the candidates to elections, and 4.4 p.p. less likely to believe that politicians in the country prioritize their personal interests over the common good. Comparing these perspectives to the political context of the country that was previously presented, it seems like women may maintain a naiveness on the motivation behind politicians' work in the country and on the means they use to reach their intended ends.

Two important results, that start unravelling an explanation for the identified gender gap,

are those given in columns (7) and (8) of Table 2. They grant us that women are 7 p.p. more likely than men to perceive the country as a democracy, while they are also 14 p.p. less likely to be able to understand and describe the concept. These results hint at the idea that women's lack of political knowledge might be driving the gender gap in political perceptions, for while women are more likely to identify Guinea-Bissau's political system as a democracy, they are also less likely to understand the concept itself.

5.2. The Influence of Political Activity on Perceptions

To explore the influence of political activity on perceptions, we will be taking the variable *political_activity* and interacting it with gender. Table 3 shows the results for this interaction, specified in Model (2). We'll notice for this table that results are essentially only significant for non-politically active female, while for politically active male and female they are mostly statistically insignificant. However, we will still be analyzing the direction of the results for these last two groups, as they provide valuable information to strengthen our insights on the influence of political activity on perceptions. At this point, it's also important to be aware that non-politically active women constitute 82.9% of the female sample in *Voices do Povo*, making them a big majority.

Starting, as before, by the opinion on the president's execution of his role, we see that non-politically active women are 10.1 p.p. less likely than non-politically active men to believe that the president ignores the constitution, meaning the gender gap is sustained. However, even if not statistically significant, we also notice that the coefficients for politically active male and female go in the opposite direction. This seems to suggest a fissure between politically active and non-politically active female, that puts politically active women closer in perspective to politically active men than to non-politically active women. Although that dissonance is not as evident for believing that the president ignores the national assembly, we still see a weighty

difference in the magnitude of the coefficients. The gap within female becomes once again very evident when we look into perceiving the president as corrupt. Non-politically active women are 8.5 p.p. less likely than non-politically active men to perceive the president as corrupt, while the coefficient for politically active women follows the opposite direction.

Table 3: Political Activity Interaction with Gender Explaining Political Perceptions in Guinea-Bissau

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	President Ignores the Constitution	President Ignores the National Assembly	Perceive the President as Corrupt	Fair Media Coverage During Elections	Bribed Votes During Elections	Politicians Pursue Personal Interests	Perceive the Country as a Democracy	Understand the Concept of Democracy
Politically Active Male	0.0614 (0.0457)	0.0218 (0.0528)	-0.0433 (0.0552)	-0.113** (0.0501)	0.00922 (0.0487)	0.0228 (0.0204)	0.0406 (0.0532)	0.161*** (0.0466)
Non-Politically Active Female	-0.101*** (0.0339)	-0.0734** (0.0344)	-0.0848** (0.0345)	0.0832*** (0.0303)	-0.0693** (0.0346)	-0.0433** (0.0201)	0.0939** (0.0391)	-0.153*** (0.0348)
Politically Active Female	0.0516 (0.0449)	-0.0371 (0.0550)	0.0269 (0.0549)	-0.0125 (0.0489)	0.0271 (0.0490)	0.00266 (0.0265)	0.00993 (0.0650)	0.0931 (0.0591)
Observations	901	917	908	918	884	1,011	797	943

Notes: The base for comparison for the interaction terms was defined as Non-Politically Active Male. For each coefficient, the numbers in the round parentheses represent the robust standard errors. The p-values have been coded as the following: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Additional controls include age, a dummy for rurality, education, a dummy for ethnicity, a dummy for religion and a dummy for region.

Passing on to results on election-related variables, the same dynamics observed for Model (1) take place. Non-politically active female are 8.3 p.p. more likely than non-politically active male to consider that all parties receive fair media coverage during elections, and 6.9 p.p. less likely to believe that voters are suborned into choosing a certain party over the other. Non-politically active women are also 4.3 p.p. less likely than non-politically active men to believe that politicians prioritize their personal interests over the pursue of the common good. For all these cases, coefficients for politically active men and women follow the opposite direction to those of non-politically active women.

In line with the findings from the first model, in Table 3 we get that non-politically active women are 9.4 p.p. more likely than non-politically active men to perceive the country as a democracy, and 15.3 p.p. less likely to understand the concept. Once again, for this last variable, we denote a spiking difference in perceptions, namely, politically active male and female are, respectively, 16.1 p.p. and 9.3 p.p. more likely than non-politically active male to understand the concept of democracy, despite this last coefficient not being statistically significant.

At this stage, enough results have been assembled to answer the initially formulated research questions. Are there differences between men and women in how they perceive the political situation in Guinea-Bissau? Yes, the data clearly indicates so, with very robust and consistent gender gaps, shown in the results for Model (1). Why are there differences in the assessment of the political situation? We have two feasible options for an answer: women have inherently different preferences and opinions from men, or they simply have less tools at their reach to comprehend the political reality of the country. Results for Model (1) suggested that women trust the president more than men and that they can, at times, be ingenuous in their perception of the motivation behind politicians' work in the country, which could lean us towards the first potential explanation. However, with the results for Model (2), we find that non-politically active women have consistently different perspectives to those of politically active women. If politically active women are closer in opinion to politically active men than to non-politically active women, gender cannot be the only variable driving the perceptions gap. Results for Model (2) confirm that the actual explanation for the gender gap in perceptions is a gap in political knowledge. Political knowledge is tied to political participation by the accumulation of experiences that the integration in politically informed environments provides. Non-politically active women's general detachment to those environments results in a distorted perception of the dynamics surrounding power structures in the country.

The key finding from this paper is that there isn't an innate biological difference between

men and women that explains the gap in perceptions. On the contrary, this is a question of education, knowledge, and political literacy. Women and men in Guinea-Bissau who are faced with the same political event will interpret it differently, for the instruments they can access to make sense of that same event are extremely divergent. This disparity in knowledge is most likely explained by the power of gender norms in the country, that both pushes women away from political environments and impedes them from accessing structured and rigorous education programs.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to dive into the dynamics of female political participation in Guinea-Bissau and understand the impact of a gender gap in participation on individual's political perceptions. Along this venture, we first find that there is a gender gap in political perceptions, and we then learn that political activity plays a huge role in it. Non-politically active women, which are a majority, tend to perceive events differently, not only from men, but from politically active women as well. Their discernment of the political dynamics taking place at the higher structures of power in the country does not match reality and is explained by a lack of political knowledge. The key takeaway from this analysis is that the factors defining women's political participation in Guinea-Bissau are not intrinsic, but rather extrinsic. Those factors are originated in the complex interplay of gender norms and societal expectations in Guinea-Bissau and weigh heavily on women's political ambitions. These results are robust and consistent, which makes these findings an important contribution towards the literature on political gender gaps in Sub-Saharan Africa.

This paper lays ground for political action and shows how important female political participation is. Earlier in this paper, we have shown how pivotal female political involvement has been in Guinea-Bissau's history, especially during the liberation war, and it is about time

that women are rewarded for those contributions with decision-making roles. For a healthy democracy to feature in Guinea-Bissau's future, the country must invest in promoting women's political knowledge and engagement, beyond performative measures with no translation in real life.

Despite the robustness of the findings, there are some aspects of this study that limit its potential. By choosing to use OLS regressions we simplify the interpretation of results but miss the chance to establish causal connections between variables. In Model (2), while we still analyze the direction and magnitude of results for politically active male and female, the majority of those coefficients is not statistically significant, which weakens the strength of our inference. While we find political knowledge to be the motivator behind the gender gap in perceptions, it would be interesting to further investigate how is this knowledge acquired differently depending on gender. Further research would benefit from looking into different types of political participation, as suggested in the literature, and into the role of civil society organizations, which seem to be women's preferred mean of engagement, in empowering change.

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