BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender norms and women's representation in local politics across the world

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ALiGN

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Contents

Acronyms

ALIGN	Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms
CHANGE	City Hub and Network for Gender Equity
IDEA	(International) Institute for Democratic and Electoral Assistance
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and other gender and sexual identities
OGBV	Online gender-based violence
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
UK	United Kingdom (of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States (of America)

Display items

Figures and tables

Glossary

Devolution – A process of decentralisation that shifts power from central to local government. The powers of devolved governments can vary across contexts.

Electoral system – The way in which votes are counted in an election. Majority (or plurality) systems elect the candidate/party who receives the most votes. Proportional representation systems allocate seats to candidates/parties based on the proportion of their total votes. Mixed systems combine methods of these two systems.

Social norms – The implicit and informal rules that most people accept and follow. They are influenced by our beliefs, economic circumstances and sometimes by the rewards and sanctions we might expect for either adhering to or disobeying them. Norms are embedded in formal and informal institutions (for example, in health and school systems, in governments, in the rule of law as well as in family and community practices and cultures) and are produced and reproduced through our social interactions.

Gender norms – A subset of social norms (see below). Gender norms describe how we are expected to behave as a result of the way we or others identify our gender. In most contexts, gender norms are framed in binary terms (female and male), and often reflect and reinforce unequal gender relations.

Gender quotas – Rules that demand a certain number or percentage of women in an electoral or governing group, such as on an electoral candidate list, a parliament or a committee. These can be legislative and/or voluntary and vary in their typology and impact (adapted from International IDEA, 2022).

Intersectionality – A concept, originating in Black feminism, and coined by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) which explains how different social categories interconnect to produce differing experiences of oppression and privilege for different groups of people (such as depending on their race/ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality).

Local politics – For the purposes of this research, local politics is understood as subnational state institutions, including local councils, municipal government, townships and political parties. The term is used interchangeably with local government.

1 Introduction

Women's political representation across all levels of government is a key determinant of the quality of democracy. Despite general progress in women's representation since the Beijing Platform more than 25 years ago (George et al., 2020) there remains a gap in research on the role of gender norms at the subnational level of politics and the potential for transformative action to promote greater gender equality at this level. To establish research questions that could fill these gaps and deepen ALIGN's future research work on this issue, an initial scoping review on women's representation in **local politics** and gender norms was undertaken, the findings from which are discussed in this paper.

As reflected in ALIGN's ongoing research, **gender norms** determine the distribution of power in society. By influencing the expectations of who, when and how people can access and use power, norms shape and are shaped by political spaces. Feminist social science, including the sub-field of feminist institutionalism, has analysed gender norms, usually with a focus on national political institutions such as national parliaments (Palmieri, 2011; Chappell and Waylen, 2013; Mackay and Krook, 2015; Childs, 2016). As a result of such feminist scholarship and activism, strategies have been identified for women's participation and for normative and institutional transformation. Most action and change has been in the realm of legal reform, such as rolling back laws that once barred women from government, adoption of **gender quotas** or parental leave policies enabling more women to run for and hold office.

Yet, normative shifts are slow and uneven. Around the world, political institutions still continue to systemically exclude women, enabling the systemic over-representation of men in positions of political decision-making (ALIGN, 2019; Harper et al., 2020). There is a lack of gender parity in politics in many settings, as well as a persistence of sexist attitudes, violence and harassment (Collier and Raney, 2018; Krook, 2020; Restrepo Sanín, 2022b). Moreover, as gender norms intersect with other norms, including those related to race/ethnicity, dis/ability and age, women from marginalised backgrounds are even more under-represented and discriminated against (Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021; Ceciarini, 2021).

> **Around the world, political institutions still continue to systemically exclude women, enabling the systemic over-representation of men in positions of political decision-making.**

Less attention has been paid to gender norms in other formal political spaces, namely at the level of subnational government. There is relatively little comparative work that explores how norms are reflected and operate – similarly and differently – across these levels, be it states, counties, municipalities or councils (Escobar-Lemmon and Funk, 2018). Based on data from 133 countries, UN Women estimates that women represent on average 36% of leaders at the local level. This is higher than at national levels, where they represent an average of 25% of leaders (Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021). Given this comparison, some questions arise, such as: is it easier for women[1]

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1   In this report we use the term woman and female (in relation to politicians, elites, leaders, etc.) interchangeably. This is in reflection of much of the existing research and literature, which we source and which does not commonly distinguish between the two terms or problematize cisgender normativity of sex-based terminology.

to enter local politics because gendered expectations change based on the level of power? Are women better able to wield power outside of top-level (national/federal-level) politics because of their ties to 'local' communities and gendered expectations of care? Would rural communities, which tend to be seen as more conservative and patriarchal, be less accepting of women leaders?

An initial scoping literature review was conducted to shed light on some of the complex puzzles and contradictions around gender norms and subnational politics. There is not a clear set of available literature that examines gender norms at this level of politics and governance. Existing studies tend to focus less on norms themselves and more on some of the structures and institutions (such as quotas and political party selection processes) that clearly shape and are shaped by norms. This report provides an initial overview of the limited research on gender norms and local politics, aiming to bring together disparate literature to map this area, and to offer some initial case studies and ideas for future research. The results of the forthcoming research supported by ALIGN micro-grants will broaden this knowledge.

2 Methodology

A rapid scoping literature review was conducted. Its objective was to inform the aforementioned ALIGN micro-grants scheme, which seeks to support organisations to develop further grassroots research on women in local politics around the world. The scope of the literature review is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Scope of literature review

Timeframe	Focus on the last five years. Some older, particularly significant conceptual or historically relevant material was also included.
Subject areas	Global, regional, and country-specific empirical literature on women in local politics (as candidates and elected representatives) and gender norms, with a (fulfilled) goal of ensuring that the review covered research from all of the world's regions.
Type of resources	• Academic literature focusing on women in local politics and gender norms. • Reports from international organisations and government association websites focused on gender and/or local government. • Mailing lists (WomenLead and Women's Representation in Politics) for experts on women in politics were also consulted for the most up to date relevant news and analysis.

During the initial stage, global empirical literature on women's representation in local politics was reviewed. Given the lack of global empirical data, this part of the review focused on the small number of reports and global datasets specifically on women in local politics by UN Women and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). To offer some comparison to the global picture of national-level politics, UN Women and The Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) reports and datasets on women in national politics were consulted. In addition, ALIGN's existing research on gender norms informed the analysis of governance-related gender norms. The subsequent stage of the review employed a snowball/citation-tracking method. The relevant sources cited in the initially reviewed reports were reviewed. To support and develop the analysis, and ensure a coverage of existing literature, the additional keyword searches, summarized in Figure 1 below, were undertaken in the Google Scholar literature database.

As the review and analysis progressed and input was received by expert colleagues and peer reviewers, some additional conceptual articles on gender norms and international development programming were referenced, as well as empirical research on specific topics, such gender quotas and violence against women in politics.

Figure 1: Key search terms

WOMEN	LOCAL POLITICS
WOMEN	LOCAL GOVERNMENT
WOMEN	SUBNATIONAL POLITICS
WOMEN	SUBNATIONAL GOVERNMENT
WOMEN	MUNICIPAL POLITICS
WOMEN	LOCAL POLITICS	GENDER NORMS
WOMEN	SUBNATIONAL POLITICS	GENDER NORMS
WOMEN	MUNICIPAL POLITICS	GENDER NORMS
WOMEN	LOCAL GOVERNMENT	GENDER NORMS
WOMEN	SUBNATIONAL GOVERNMENT	GENDER NORMS
WOMEN	MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT	GENDER NORMS
WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION	LOCAL POLITICS
WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION	LOCAL POLITICS	MEN'S RESISTANCE
WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION	LOCAL GOVERNMENT	MEN'S RESISTANCE
WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION	SUBNATIONAL POLITICS	MEN'S RESISTANCE
WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION	SUBNATIONAL GOVERNMENT	MEN'S RESISTANCE
WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION	MUNICIPAL POLITICS	MEN'S RESISTANCE
WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION	MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT	MEN'S RESISTANCE

In the future, other conceptualisations and words to capture women's political representation and leadership at 'local' level could be used and should be explored. Future literature reviews could therefore search more databases, expand the time period, explore further aspects and add conceptualisations of local governance and public affairs. For example, researchers could expand the narrow focus of formal, electoral political institutions to explore community-based decision-making and leadership, drawing on the rich research around the interconnections of feminist movements and local politics. In addition, future reviews could conduct a more systematic search of reports, including project evaluations from international and local organisations on women's participation in local politics.

3 Gender norms and local governance

3.1 Impacts of norms on women's representation in local politics

Multiple studies across geographic contexts have identified how gender norms serve as persistent barriers for women participating in all levels of politics, from voting, to running for office, to engaging in political parties (Ceciarini, 2021). Figure 2 offers examples of gendered norms and attitudes in politics.

Gender norms can manifest in voters' attitudes and media representation of women in local politics. In Kenya, Bouka et al. (2019) identify 'the stickiness of patriarchal attitudes towards women's leadership' and Berry et al. (2021) note a norm of 'perceived ineffectiveness' of women political candidates in some places in the country. Similarly, research on municipalities in the Caribbean, Central and South America[2] suggest that women do not run for office in some places because of cultural norms around women's social roles (Escobar-Lemmon and Funk, 2018). Research in India indicates that there is less support for women candidates in state legislatures in states that have more entrenched gender bias (Bhalotra et al., 2018). Women mayors in Canada 'experience backlash from voters when they display the traits typically associated with strong leaders' (Tolley et al., 2022). In Spain, Verge and Pastor (2018) argue that the normative persistence of politics as a 'man's game' is shown in the media's symbolic representation of novelty when the first woman is elected into a political position.

Gender norms can also shape the types of roles women have in local politics, in turn shaping resultant policies and services. As in national politics, there is some evidence that women cabinet/executive members may be more likely to take on more traditional 'feminised' policy areas, such as education and social services, and are less likely to be in more traditional masculine roles, such as transport (Bird, 2003; Bouka et al., 2019; Ceciarini, 2021; Fawcett Society, 2021). Research from the United States (US) indicates that women tend to perform well in hyper-local elections (e.g. school board, county clerk and city council elections) compared with more executive-level elections, such as mayoral races. This is because women can be stereotyped as being effective in promoting care and education policy, and in roles that are closer to voters, but less effective in roles that demand more 'strategic' and 'executive' leadership skills (Holman, 2017; Bernick and Heidbreder, 2018; Anzia and Bernhard, 2022).

> **The normative persistence of politics as a 'man's game' is shown in the media's symbolic representation of novelty when the first woman is elected into a political position.**

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2   Throughout this paper the authors use 'Caribbean, Central and South America' to refer to countries that Escobar-Lemmon and Funk (2018) study under the umbrella term of 'Latin America'. They do so in recognition of the contestations over the term's colonial inheritance and contemporary appropriateness, as well as to highlight the diversity of continental geographical regions subsumed under the 'Latin America' label.

This research suggests that gender norms around women being caring and effective in certain areas may lead to women being well represented in local politics in general, but that these same norms keep women out of leadership positions and policy areas that are seen as more 'strategic' and traditionally 'masculine'.

Norms around women's responsibilities in the family can impact women's political participation, which can variously interact with local political and economic environments to shape political outcomes (Fawcett Society, 2017; Emery et al., 2018; Ceciarini, 2021). For example, research in Kenya (Bouka et al., 2019) found that women had to prove their domestic abilities in order to gain voters' trust, and to be elected such scrutiny deters many women from running for elections.

Similarly, research in Malawi found that voters prefer political candidates who are married with children, which, in practice, means more men than women compete (Clayton, 2021). In their cross-national study of women's representation in subnational governments in the Caribbean, Central and South America, Escobar-Lemmon and Funk (2018) found that countries with women's higher labour force participation and lower fertility rates had higher representation of women in local legislatures.
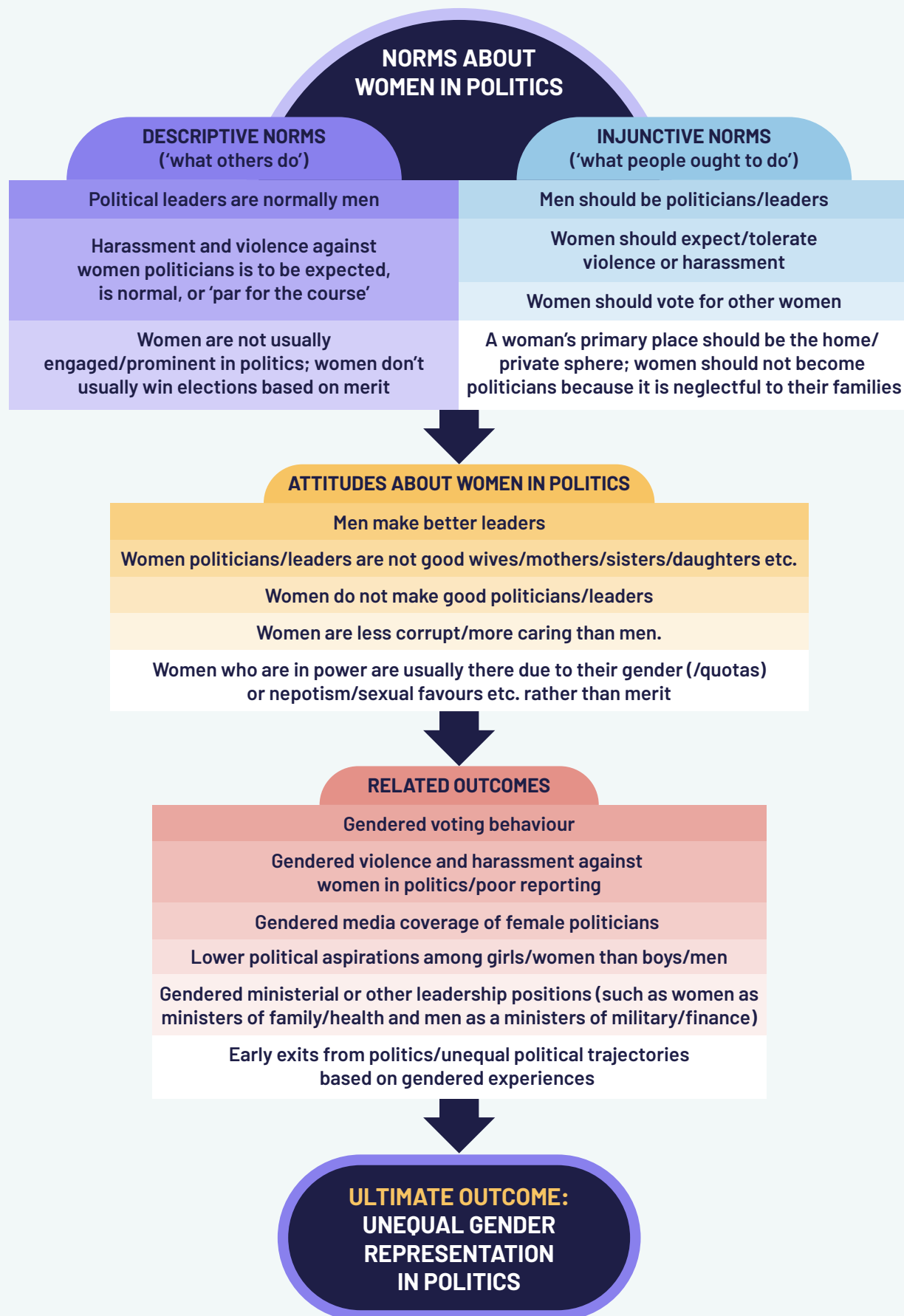
Such normative barriers can interact with specific elements of local political systems and society. For example, local politicians may lack workplace protections that may otherwise exist at the national level. A report in the United Kingdom (UK) identified the barrier that councillors are not nationally entitled to parental leave and, as of 2019, only about a quarter of councils have parental leave policies for councillors (Fawcett Society, 2021).

Similarly, local politicians may not be offered care facilities, which may impact the ability of some women to participate; even when care policies and facilities are formally in place, informal norms and practices of not making use of these policies sometimes exist (Fawcett Society, 2017). Even in Sweden, where there are relatively progressive gender norms and high levels of women in politics, there is evidence that women, particularly aged under 44, in local politics face challenges in navigating their home and domestic responsibilities (Johansson Sevä and Öun, 2019).

Due to the expectations to fulfil care responsibilities, women tend to be economically less secure and have less disposable income compared to men. This has further implications for women's representation in local politics. The monetary costs of campaign spending can be a particular barrier to participation; further, women may have to spend more because they are likely to be challengers, rather than incumbents, which tends to cost more (Maguire, 2018; Aktar and McIntyre-Mills, 2019; Bouka et al., 2019; Muriaas et al., 2019; Berry et al., 2021; Piscopo et al., 2022). Similarly, relatively low payment for local politicians (if they are paid at all) may particularly deter women's participation in local government (Maguire, 2018). In a 2017 survey in the UK, women were more likely than men to identify low allowance as a barrier to being a councillor (Fawcett Society, 2017).

This research seems to indicate that to meaningfully increase and sustain women's participation in local politics, gender norms need to be actively addressed by institutional commitment and design. It should not be assumed that women can fit into an existing mould.

Figure 2: Examples of gendered norms and attitudes in politics

NORMS ABOUT WOMEN IN POLITICS

DESCRIPTIVE NORMS ('what others do')

- Political leaders are normally men
- Harassment and violence against women politicians is to be expected, is normal, or 'par for the course'
- Women are not usually engaged/prominent in politics; women don't usually win elections based on merit

INJUNCTIVE NORMS ('what people ought to do')

- Men should be politicians/leaders
- Women should expect/tolerate violence or harassment
- Women should vote for other women
- A woman's primary place should be the home/ private sphere; women should not become politicians because it is neglectful to their families

ATTITUDES ABOUT WOMEN IN POLITICS

- Men make better leaders
- Women politicians/leaders are not good wives/mothers/sisters/daughters etc.
- Women do not make good politicians/leaders
- Women are less corrupt/more caring than men.
- Women who are in power are usually there due to their gender (/quotas) or nepotism/sexual favours etc. rather than merit

RELATED OUTCOMES

- Gendered voting behaviour
- Gendered violence and harassment against women in politics/poor reporting
- Gendered media coverage of female politicians
- Lower political aspirations among girls/women than boys/men
- Gendered ministerial or other leadership positions (such as women as ministers of family/health and men as a ministers of military/finance)
- Early exits from politics/unequal political trajectories based on gendered experiences

ULTIMATE OUTCOME: UNEQUAL GENDER REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS

However, gender norms may present some opportunities for women's participation in politics. Voters may view women's emergence in politics as a signal of renewal, and it can be a strategic choice on the part of women to position themselves as candidates that will enact change and inclusion (Morgan and Buice, 2013; Funk, 2015). Similarly, there is some evidence that women are stereotyped as having more integrity and being less likely to engage in corruption than men, which can benefit their electoral chances in local politics (Barnes and Beaulieu, 2019; Thomas and Petrow, 2020). Yet, even this apparently positive picture is mixed: because of stereotyping, women are punished more harshly than men when they do or are perceived to engage in corruption (Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer, 2018; Wiesehomeier and Verge, 2020).

In places where women are afforded the opportunity to serve in decision-making positions, for example as mayors/leaders and executive/cabinet members, women may be able to redefine local priorities, for example prioritising family-friendly policies, which may normalise previously marginalised policy issues that impact women (Meier and Funk, 2017; Bouka et al., 2019; Donno and Kreft, 2019; Funk and Philips, 2019; Hinojosa and Kittilson, 2020; Brown, 2021). During the COVID-19 crisis, there has been some indication that women political leaders (on national and local levels around the world) have tended to better prioritise social protections and public health compared to male leaders, which may lead to norm change around effective leadership (Piscopo and Och, 2021).

There is some evidence that having women leaders can transform gender norms through (gradually) normalising women in public life (Kerevel and Atkeson, 2015; Burnet, 2019; George et al., 2020). Relatedly, some studies suggest that the presence of women leaders in executive positions (e.g. as mayors) increases the likelihood that women will be elected in the legislators (Baskaran and Hessami, 2018). Research from Canada and Australia indicates that, over time, as more women enter local leadership positions, media coverage becomes less obviously gendered. For example, there is less focus on personal characteristics and more applause for 'collaborative' styles of leadership among men and women (Trimble et al., 2021, 2022; Wagner et al., 2021).

The presence and actions of women in particular areas and/or of particular identities can challenge intersecting gendered norms of power. For example, research from Yucatán, Mexico, finds that female indigenous mayors are subtly changing norms of power (Loyola-Hernández, 2018). Similarly, recent research from rural Bangladesh argues that women leaders, elected by quotas, have gradually been able to shift gender norms around leadership (Tanjeela, 2021). Rather than simply adapting to norms, women in power can challenge and reshape institutional norms.

While gender norms present barriers for women's participation in politics, the shifting nature of norms offers a mixed picture in terms of opportunities for women. More research is needed to understand the specific relationship between local gender norms and women's local political participation.

> " There is some evidence that having women leaders can transform gender norms through normalising women in public life.

3.2 International normative agendas and emerging global data on women in local politics

The importance of women's political participation was enshrined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a historic blueprint for women's rights that emphasises the importance of women's equal political participation 'at all levels' of political power and decision-making, including local levels (UN, 1995: paras. 11, 44 and 181). Other global and regional normative frameworks, such the 2011 UN General Assembly (2011) resolution on women's political participation, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life (2006), affirm the importance of equal participation at all levels of government (Krook, 2009; Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021; Ceciarini, 2021).

Yet, despite this international normative commitment, there seems to be relatively little research and discussion on women's participation in local politics (Pini and McDonald, 2011; Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021). Until recently, there was no specific incentive to monitor women's participation in local government in the SDG indicators, which means there is little known about women's participation in local government compared to national government (which has been monitored through SDG indicator 5.5.1a on a regular basis by the IPU).

UN Women is now the custodian of the local government indicator 5.5.1b (Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021). Yet, it is important to note that there are challenges in global monitoring because of the diversity of local government systems and levels of power. Even within nations, there can be a huge diversity among the organisations of local government (Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021). For example, federal systems function very differently from unitary systems, and legislative positions can differ from executive positions. Some 'local' politicians may represent a small population, while others may represent extremely large constituencies wielding more significant power. Available data that groups these different categories can fail to capture these differences, limiting the insights that can be drawn in this diverse political space.

> **Women are better represented in local government than in national parliaments; but, in the majority of countries, women are still under-represented.**
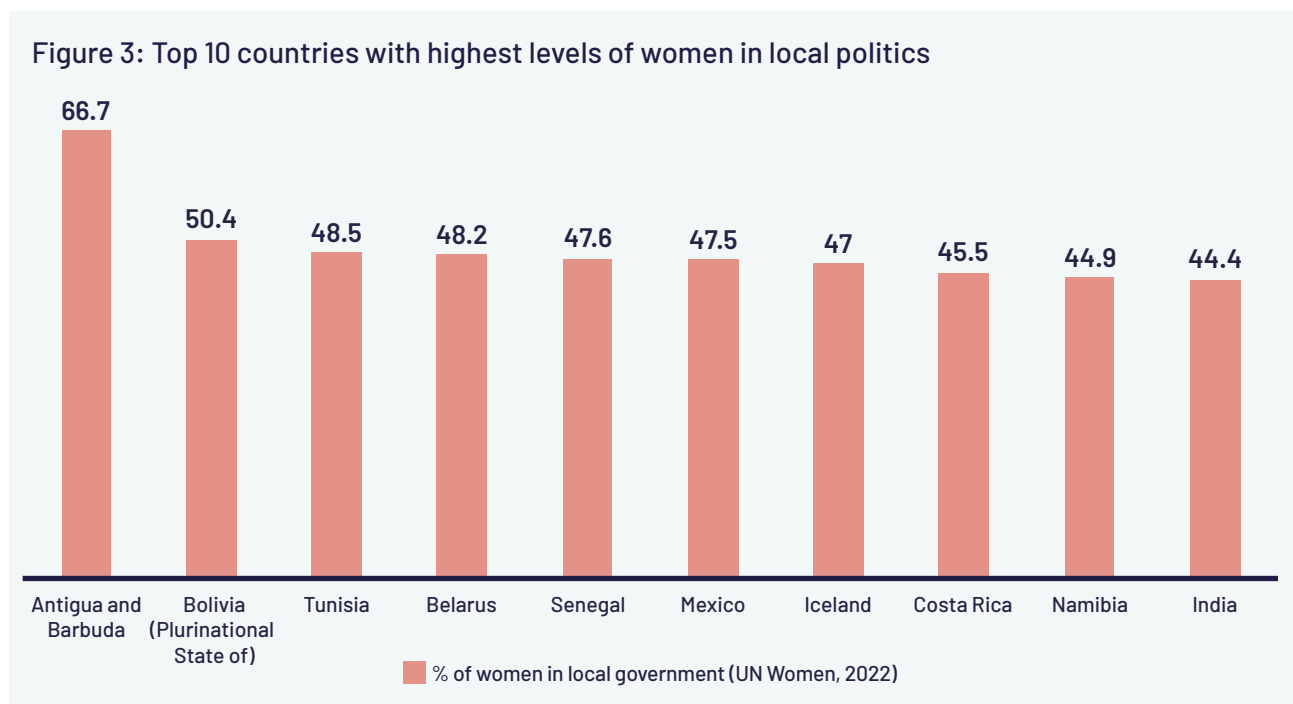
Data indicates that women are better represented in local government than in national parliaments; but, in the majority of countries, women are still under-represented. Women's local government representation is highest in Central and Southern Asia (41%) and Europe and Northern America (35%), and lowest in Western Asia and Northern Africa (18%) (Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021). Comparing data on national representation from the IPU (2021, 2022a), women's national/parliamentary government representation is highest in the Americas (33.8% in 2022; 31.1% in 2020) and Europe (31.1% in 2022; 30.1% in 2020); it is lowest in Asia (20.7% in 2021; 20.5% in 2020). Notably, there has been an increase in the proportion in women's representation in all regions of the world since 1995 (but there have been periods of increases and decreases within regions).

While research is somewhat limited, the literature suggests several interrelated factors for women's relatively high representation in local politics.
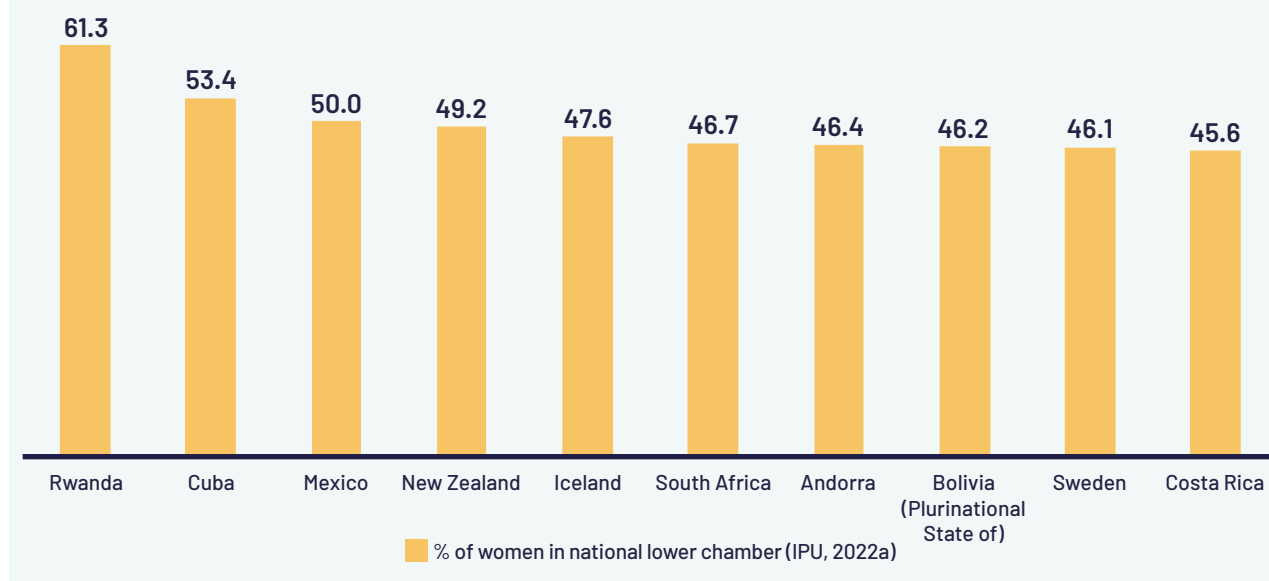
For example, globally, there seems to be a relationship between relatively high levels of representation of women at different levels of government. The countries with the highest numbers of women in local politics also tend to have relatively high women's representation at the national level. Using comparable and available data from 2022, the top 10 countries with the highest number of women in local politics had over 40% women in national politics (lower chambers), except Tunisia, which had 25%, India, which had 14.9%, and Antigua and Barbuda, which had only 11.1% women in national government. Likewise, the places with the highest levels of national women's representation also tended to have relatively high women's representation at the local level.[3] The causal direction between local and national women's political representation may be contested and may be different in different places; this could be a rich avenue for research.

Using the most up to date data from January 2022 from UN Women's (2022b) global database, Women in Local Government, and the national-level data from the IPU (2022b), Figures 3 and 4 summarise the country-level data for places with the highest levels of local and national women's representation.

Figure 3: Top 10 countries with highest levels of women in local politics

Antigua and Barbuda: 66.7
Bolivia (Plurinational State of): 50.4
Tunisia: 48.5
Belarus: 48.2
Senegal: 47.6
Mexico: 47.5
Iceland: 47
Costa Rica: 45.5
Namibia: 44.9
India: 44.4

% of women in local government (UN Women, 2022)

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3   The much larger share of women in local than in national politics in Antigua and Barbuda may be explained by the structure of national and local politics. There is only one local government body in the country, the 11-person Barbuda council with six elected women (UNDP, 2015; Commonwealth Local Government Forum, 2020; UN Women, 2022b) and there are only 18 national Members of Parliament, two of whom are women (IPU, 2022a). While the percentage of women in local government is high, the actual numbers are still rather low, which makes it somewhat of an outlier among the other countries that have higher numbers of women in local government.

Figure 4: Top 10 countries with highest levels of women in national politics

Bar chart showing % of women in national lower chamber (IPU, 2022a):
- Rwanda: 61.3
- Cuba: 53.4
- Mexico: 50.0
- New Zealand: 49.2
- Iceland: 47.6
- South Africa: 46.7
- Andorra: 46.4
- Bolivia (Plurinational State of): 46.2
- Sweden: 46.1
- Costa Rica: 45.6

% of women in national lower chamber (IPU, 2022a)

An important explanation for why some countries have relatively high levels of women in local (and national) government is gender quotas.[4] According to UN Women, nearly half of countries use quotas to improve women's representation in local government – most commonly a minimum requirement of women, usually 30% or 40% – on a candidate list.[5] These quotas have had some positive effects in terms of women's descriptive representation in local politics. According to UN Women, women's representation in local government is, on average, 7% higher in countries with legislative quotas than in those without (Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021). As quotas for women in national government have risen, so, too, have those for local politics. Gender quotas for women in local politics are rising in South Asia (Pande and Ford, 2012; Mohiuddin and Ahmed, 2020) and parts of the African continent (Berry et al., 2021). Women's representation in local government is also rising in these areas by, on average, 16% in the UN defined regions of sub-Saharan Africa[6], 13% in Northern Africa and Western Asia, and 7% in the rest of Asia (Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021).

Although comparative research is limited, local-level gender quotas seem more common than national-level quotas, with some places having local but not national-level quotas. Across the continent of Africa, Asia and the Middle East, several countries have quotas for women at a local level, but not at a national level (Krook, 2009). For example, India has constitutionally enshrined subnational quotas but, despite

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4   An explanation for the relatively lower number of women in national (26.3%) compared to local politics (48.5%) in Tunisia could be the type of quotas. While Tunisia has had party quotas for both national and local politics, only the quotas for local elections require that women are at the top of lists, while parties may put women lower on the lists for national elections (Benstead, 2019).

5   Some governments impose sanctions, such as fines or loss of public funding, for parties that do not implement the quotas. Another type of quota is reserved seats for women (Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021). Further to legislative quotas, some political parties also have their own gender quotas to increase the representation of women candidates (Krook, 2009).

6   'Sub-Saharan Africa' is a regional category used across the UN system and many international institutions https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/regional-groups/. In this review, the authors would like to acknowledge current debates which challenge the use of this terminology, questioning the colonial roots and homogenising nature of the term. Although in this instance authors employ 'sub-Saharan Africa' to reference current literature, ALIGN and ODI will continue interrogating the appropriateness of the term and work with our partners to develop more appropriate language for geographical regions.

some pressure, has not extended the provision to national/federal-level quotas (O'Connell, 2020). Further explanation of the causes and impacts of this global trend for local over national quotas, and the intersection with efforts to transform gender norms, would be a rich avenue for further study.

Quotas also do not seem to fully explain the outliers where there are more women in national government than local government. These countries are mixed in terms of the existence of gender quotas at the national and/or local level (International IDEA, 2022; IPU, 2022a). However, the design, history and timing of quotas and their impact on gender norms may be part of the explanation. For example, the discrepancy between the proportion of women in local and national government in Zimbabwe (30.6% at national level versus 12% at local level) could be explained by differences in quota design and norms. The 2013 Constitution enshrined national-level gender quotas that reserved 60 seats for women. For local council elections with 10 members or more, a proportional representation system is used with alternate male and female candidate lists (International IDEA, 2022). As such, there has been a longer history of national-level gender quotas and women being visible in politics compared with local quotas. Yet, ALIGN's research on local government in Zimbabwe shows that the local quota system was less effective than expected due to persistent harmful gender norms that manifested through women councillors experiencing sexual abuse at the hands of senior local government staff (Social Healing and Accountability Research, 2021).

At both local and national levels, women's representation in leadership positions is low. At the national level, only 10% of countries had women leaders at the beginning of 2021, and women made up less than a quarter (21.9%) of government ministers (IPU, 2021). This lack of leadership representation is especially low when compared to women's representation in local government overall (Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021; Ceciarini, 2021). Similarly, in their cross-national study of women's representation in subnational governments in the Caribbean, Central and South America, Escobar-Lemmon and Funk (2018) find that women's electoral success in subnational legislators (for example in city council seats) is not reflected in women's representation in executive positions (for example mayoral offices). This likely reflects gender norms that imply women are less fit for the most powerful positions.

> **This likely reflects gender norms that imply women are less fit for the most powerful positions.**

3.3 Intersectional norms and contextual differences

Gender norms interact with other norms around race, ethnicity, age, dis/ability and sexuality to create unique barriers for particular women in their specific settings. Within and across countries, evidence shows that different women experience different barriers to enter and progress in politics (Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021; Ceciarini, 2021).

For example, a UK survey found that disabled women,[7] women of ethnic minorities and **LGBTQI+** women councillors have experienced multiple discrimination in their political roles (Fawcett Society, 2017). Furthermore, research in different contexts has found that race, ethnicity, caste and/or migration status can be a differential for women's political participation. In the US, while women of colour seem to be mayors in similar numbers as white women, they mostly serve in small cities (Holman, 2017). In Nepal, a 2017 law requires one in every four ward members to be a Dalit women, but still no Dalit woman has been elected mayor or chairperson (Chawla, 2022; Pradhan and Ghimire, 2022). In Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, caste and class intersecting with gender can impact minority women's participation in local politics (Nazneen, 2018). Research in Ireland found that migrant women experience racist and sexist abuse while canvassing and that Traveller women are marginalised from local politics, partly due to norms around political leadership that privilege certain types of men and individualist leadership over more collectivist styles (Cullen and Gough, 2022).

In terms of class/status, a study on women's representation in local government in Bangladesh found that women politicians tended to be elite and not necessarily socioeconomically representative of their population (Mohiuddin and Ahmed, 2020). In Africa (and elsewhere), women with 'social capital' through their family connections may be more able than other women to participate in politics (Amponsah and Boateng, 2021). Notably, in some places there can be deliberate family co-option of women-only positions, signalling entrenching of gender norms: global research in Ghana, Egypt, Sierra Leone, Bangladesh, India, Brazil, Costa Rica and Sudan found evidence that some sisters and wives were brought in on women-only tickets to vote against sexual and reproductive health and rights policies (Tadros, 2011).

In addition, UN Women found that globally, across all tiers of local government, younger and older women are less represented. Women are best represented in age groups from 40 to 59 years (Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021). An Australian study also found that there was a 'missing cohort' of younger women running for local government due to domestic responsibilities (Carson et al., 2021). This may reflect the lack of parental leave and attention to caring responsibilities on the part of local government institutions.

Clearly, an **intersectional** lens is important to understand the different practical and/or normative barriers faced by women. It is also important to understand geographic contextual differences. While there are common and shared patriarchal norms across the world, there can be specific differences, for example within-country differences between urban and rural areas or in conflict affected settings.

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7   We use the term disabled women/people with disabilities throughout the report reflecting the original language the reports we draw on. However, we recognise that people use different terms to describe and communicate their experiences and embodied politics tied to abilities.

Differences in the prevalence of discriminatory gender norms and egalitarian values likely explain some of the geographic variation of women's local government representation. Urban areas, especially capital cities, generally have higher representation of women, compared to rural areas. Researchers have posited that this variation can likely be explained by more egalitarian norms in urban areas and persistent patriarchal norms in rural regions (Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021). UN Women reference the World Values Survey (Haerpfer et al., 2020), which found that in 74 countries, on average, 47% of people in rural areas believe that men make better leaders than women, compared to 34% of urban residents (Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021).

This global picture is reflected in some country-specific studies. In France, women's representation is lower in the lowest tier of local government compared to higher tiers. This is likely due to patriarchal values in rural areas and the **electoral system**, because the lowest tier of local government uses the majority electoral system, while the other tiers use the proportional representation system) (Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021). In the US and UK, there are more women in city compared to county-level government (Holman, 2017; Maguire, 2018). In Japan, women's representation is lower in rural areas than in cities, especially the capital, Tokyo, which is likely to be at least partly due to differences in gender norms (Dalton, 2021).

In Rwanda, there is evidence that women in rural areas face conflict with their husbands for spending so much time out of the home in their local government duties (Burnet, 2019). A study in rural Bangladesh found that women were not able to campaign in the same ways as men, at night or in some public spaces, because of gender norms around mobility and personal freedom (Aktar and McIntyre-Mills, 2019).

Women in fragile and conflict-affected settings seem to share particular normative and practical barriers to entering local politics, such as increased risks of gender-based violence and gender/women's issues being politically side-lined during crises (Ceciarini, 2021). This is despite women's descriptive representation on the national level coming into increased focus due to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and pressures from international organisations and watchdogs (UN Women, 2022a).

Countries that have rewritten constitutions in recent years often face international pressures to adopt quotas and protections for women's rights, which may offer the potential for gender norm change. Externally driven processes could, however, risk leading to a focus on formal changes that mask or are not met with deeper societal change or that encourage tokenism and raise backlash.

Overall, however, conflict and subsequent transitions to peace have been linked to changes in gender norms, reflected in women's increased political participation in some settings, which holds potential to filter to local political settings (Berry, 2018; Bouka et al., 2019; Berry et al., 2021; Ceciarini, 2021). Long transition processes that include developing new constitutions tend to be more conducive to gender inclusion (Hubbard and Brechenmacher, 2020). For example, Tunisia's Constitution in 2014, post Arab Spring, decentralised political decision-making and enshrined women's rights; the number of women in local (and national) politics has increased since then (Ceciarini, 2021). These developments are expected to change following constitutional and legal reforms in Tunisia in 2022, which have changed the electoral system, including the removal of gender parity quotas (Yerkes and Al-Mailam, 2022).

4 Strategies for change at the local level: an emerging agenda

The literature reviewed suggests several strategies that could support targeted responses to address the norm-based barriers to women's participation in local politics. This section highlights several potential avenues, but more research is needed to analyse the effectiveness of these solutions and their impacts within different local contexts.

4.1 Shifting gender norms in local elections: gender quotas and electoral systems

Quotas remain an important instrument for increasing the numbers of women in politics at all levels. In addition, there is some evidence to suggest that, by increasing the numbers of women in politics, quotas can have a normative impact, transforming perceptions towards a belief that women do belong in politics. For example, research from Rwanda indicates that national and local level quotas have increased visibility of women in public life and, as such, have gone some way in changing perceptions about women's roles (Burnet, 2019). In West Bengal, India, having one-third of village council leadership positions reserved for women has led to increased representation and weakened stereotypes about women's leadership; after 10 years of the policy, women were more likely to run for election (Berryhill and Fuentes, 2021).

It is important to note that quotas can also entrench and produce other inequalities, reflecting broader social stratification. For example, there is evidence that gender quotas have not improved ethnic minority women's representation, and quotas for ethnic minority politicians, such as reserved seats for the Roma community in local/municipal councils in Slovenia, tend to lead to men being elected (Cullen and Gough, 2022). Similarly, research on subnational quotas in India indicates that constituencies that have reserved seats for women are less likely to elect candidates from underprivileged castes (Karekurve-Ramachandra and Lee, 2020). Paredes and Došek (2020) argue that Peru's gender, youth and indigenous quota requirements for subnational level electoral ballots can actually limit the representation of minorities because one candidate can fulfil all the quota obligations.

Crucially, gender quotas are only one tool to improve the representation of women and should be viewed holistically in an effort to transform gender norms and other intersecting barriers (Pande and Ford, 2012; Escobar-Lemmon and Funk, 2018; Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021).

> Quotas remain an important instrument for increasing the numbers of women in politics at all levels.

Further to quotas, broader changes in the electoral system can also increase women's participation and normalisation in politics. Electoral systems can shape the possibilities of women's participation in politics, and some systems can help interact with norm-based barriers to improve women's chances in politics.

The majority of countries use a proportional representation or mixed electoral system for local elections (Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021). These systems tend to result in a higher representation of women at the local level compared to first-past-the-post/majority systems (Bouka et al., 2019; Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021). Globally, on average, women's representation is 28% in proportional representation systems, 26% in mixed systems and 22% in majority/plurality systems elections (Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021). Previous research from Chile (Hinojosa and Franceschet, 2012) found that the 2002 change from proportional representation to a plurality system for electing mayors reduced opportunities for women's participation.

However, while proportional representation electoral systems are generally enabling, they can be used to marginalise women, particularly when political parties are not committed to women's representation. For example, many political parties in Cambodia put women at the bottom of the list to reduce the chances of them being selected (Ceciarini, 2021). In France and Spain, political parties have disproportionately assigned 'unwinnable' seats to women and 'safe' seats to men (Verge and Troupel, 2011). There is evidence that incumbency for local government positions may favour men and be a barrier for women being elected, as women tend to be challengers, especially in areas without term limits (Fawcett Society, 2017; McGregor et al., 2017; Bouka et al., 2019). A study on women's representation in subnational governments in the Caribbean, Central and South America (Escobar-Lemmon and Funk, 2018). Again, addressing the electoral system is not sufficient to increasing women's representation and transforming gender norms. To be transformative, many changes need to happen in tandem.

> " While proportional representation electoral systems are generally enabling, they can be used to marginalise women.

4.2 Creating gender-responsive institutions: local government workplaces and political parties

Many local government institutions have purposively become gender responsive and hold the potential to expand inclusion. Local governments that offer effective workplace benefits and protections and implement gender mainstreaming can include specific efforts to promote women's representation in local politics (Ceciarini, 2021).

For example, UCLG has developed an Africa–Europe Pact for gender equality in 2021 (Ceciarini, 2021). City Hub and Network for Gender Equity (CHANGE, 2021), a partnership with founding cities Barcelona, Freetown, London, Los Angeles, Mexico City and Tokyo, has created a toolkit for city leadership to enact transformative gender mainstreaming. In particular, the City of Barcelona has a specific gender mainstreaming department, which encourages the participation of women and LGBTQI+ people (Ceciarini, 2021; CHANGE, 2021). To increase and retain women councillors, the UK's national Local Government Association (2019) has developed guidance for councils on areas such as parental leave policies and remote council meetings.

Yet, if gender responsiveness is not actively embedded as part of local government institutions, there may be a default to masculine norms that can deter women's participation. Studies have found that long meeting hours and places with a 'macho' or combative culture may deter women from entering and participating in

politics (Palmieri, 2011; Pini and McDonald, 2011; Childs, 2016; Fawcett Society, 2017). Informal institutions of socialising may also deter women (Dalton, 2021). Individual administrative and political leaders of local government institutions also play a role as they may have different levels of political will to focus on gender equality (Björkdahl and Somun-Krupalija, 2018; Ceciarini, 2021).

> **Barriers remain that suggest that political parties need to address persistent gender norms to increase and sustain the number of women in politics.**

For example, an anthology of case studies about women in local government (Pini and McDonald, 2011) highlights the power the Mayor of London has over the 'women-friendliness' of the Greater London Authority; different mayors have had different views towards women's inclusion, with one removing the high-profile role of the women's adviser. In Pakistan, despite the increased numbers of women representatives due to legislative quotas, local government administration remains male dominated, which has limited institutional change (Jabeen, 2019).

Notably, **'devolution'** (the shift in power from central to local government) may offer opportunities to improve women's politics representation, especially when devolution agendas are accompanied by principles and practices to advance gender equality. In Kenya, for example, the devolution agenda since 2010 has been accompanied by 'the gender principle' of quotas, with an increase in women's political representation across the country (Bouka et al., 2019). In India, a constitutional amendment that decentralised power to states required that one-third of leader positions be reserved for women, and that the reservation be rotated between elections (O'Connell, 2020). In Pakistan, the 2000 devolution plan included the reservation of one-third of union, municipality and district levels seats for women (Jabeen, 2019).

In the UK, the devolution to Wales was accompanied by an effort to increase the diversity of representatives, leading to gender parity among Welsh Assembly Members in 2003 (Fawcett Society, 2017). This focus on gender equality seems to have at least been partly the result of the efforts of feminist campaigners in both Scotland and Wales who argued that the devolution agenda should involve 'new politics', including more diverse and representative politics (McMillan and Fox, 2010).

Political parties are hugely important vehicles that can both enable and exclude women (Fawcett Society, 2017; Escobar-Lemmon and Funk, 2018; Bouka et al., 2019; Donno and Kreft, 2019; Hubbard and Brechenmacher, 2020). In particular, the formal and informal rules around party nomination processes can be one of the largest barriers to women participating in politics (UNDP, 2015; Hubbard and Brechenmacher, 2020). Furthermore, male networks and clientelism seem to still play a large role in men's continued dominance across contexts (Bjarnegård, 2013; Bouka et al., 2019; Devroe et al., 2020; Ceciarini, 2021; Garcia-Hernandez et al., 2022).

Some parties have taken active steps to make transformative gender equality a concrete aim within all their processes; however, barriers remain that suggest that political parties need to address persistent gender norms to increase and sustain the number of women in politics.

4.3 Male violence against women in local politics

Working to address male violence against women, and other forms of gendered violence in politics is critical to promoting inclusive governance at all levels. As identified by ALIGN (George et al., 2021), this is becoming a central issue in governance literature and development programming. Such violence, including physical attacks, psychological abuse or online harassment and misogyny (de Meco and MacKay, 2022), is increasingly recognised as a barrier to women entering and staying in politics. Less is known, however, about how violence can manifest differently in different political spaces, and how to target strategies to specific contexts.

The awareness of this issue is often credited to the efforts of local councilwomen around the world (National Democratic Institute, 2018; UN General Assembly, 2018; Bouka et al., 2019; Krook, 2020; Berry et al., 2021; Ceciarini, 2021; Dalton, 2021; Restrepo Sanín, 2022a). For instance, the Association of Women Councillors of Bolivia was set up in response to cases of harassment experienced by councillors; it develops and supports women leaders in Bolivia and has been influential in the implementation of gender quota legislation and in addressing violence and harassment against women in politics (Ceciarini, 2021; Restrepo Sanín, 2022a).

Protections to address violence against women in politics are growing at national and subnational levels. Some places, including Bolivia in 2012, Catalonia in 2020 and Peru in 2021, have adopted specific national or regional legal frameworks that define and criminalise violence, including harassment, against women in politics (Krook, 2020; Restrepo Sanín, 2021; Verge, 2021). Furthermore, in response to the **#MeToo** movement in 2017, 23 states in the US introduced over 125 bills to address sexual harassment in local legislatures (Williams, 2018).

> " In response to the #MeToo movement in 2017, 23 states in the US introduced over 125 bills to address sexual harassment in local legislatures .

Other governments have taken measures to provide support for advice and reporting for local candidates experiencing violence. For example, in Kenya, there is a specific Electoral Gender Based Violence Rapid Response Unit and Mexico has specific websites with resources for women at all levels of politics experiencing violence (Krook, 2020). In addition, in response to concerns about candidates', especially women's, safety, England removed the requirement for local candidates to have their addresses on the ballot paper (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019). Development agencies have started addressing violence against women as part of their programming. For example, UN Women and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) produced a programming guide on preventing violence against women in elections that includes advice on legal reform, parties' codes of conduct and data collection (UN Women and UNDP, 2017).

4.4 Supporting women's associations to transform norms and local political institutions

Women's associations – whether independent or situated within councils, political parties or local government associations – can be important enablers, promoting gender mainstreaming and gender quotas, and creating networks for women to develop their capacities to participate in politics (Escobar–Lemmon and Funk, 2018; Amponsah and Boateng, 2021; Ceciarini, 2021).

Local government associations can play important roles in increasing women's political participation (Ceciarini, 2021), by creating groups for women candidates and representatives to discuss barriers and opportunities, as well as programmes to increase women's politics representation. For example, many local government associations have Women Elected Standing Committees, including in Colombia (Federation of Colombian Municipalities), France (French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions), Italy (Italian Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions), Spain (Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces, and the Basque association of local authorities), Mali (Association of Malian Municipalities) and Ukraine (Association of Ukrainian Cities) (Ceciarini, 2021). The South Africa Local Government Association created a Women's Commission, which has power on the National Executive Committee and advocates for 50/50 gender parity representation at local elections (Ceciarini, 2021). The Australian Local Government Women's Association (2022) has been influential in supporting women in politics (Pini and McDonald, 2011); its creation involved women's organisations, many of which were involved in local government.

Further to specific political women's organisations, women's civic organisations and associates more broadly have had a significant impact on women's political trajectories. It was the collective action of global, national and local women's movements that pushed for reform at the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995 and it has been national and local women's groups that have advocated for institutional change, including quotas (George et al., 2020).

> " It was the collective action of global, national and local women's movements that pushed for reform at the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995

Often, a combination of more localised efforts alongside national, regional and globalised agendas are important for movements to embed and have significant impacts. Women's groups in Bolivia, Nepal and South Africa pressured parties to ensure women were part of decisions about party rules (Hubbard and Brechenmacher, 2020). In Ireland, the example set by women in the national parliament, of setting up caucuses for women councillors of different parties, led to caucuses for women councillors of different parties and ideologies around the country (McGing, 2022). The International Development Center for the Innovative Local Governance has run a pilot gender mainstreaming programme in Béjà, Tunisia, which, among other initiatives, provided support for women's civil society organisations to increase the influence of women in decision-making (Ceciarini, 2021).

As such, wider work to support women's mobilisation/women's movements, and cross-sectoral work to address inequalities across sectors (including health, education and economic rights) is critical to inclusive politics at all levels – and is particularly impactful at the local level. Women's political representation can manifest in multiple forms, from community leadership, to social movement action online and in-person, to running for and holding different levels of public office. Critically, all these forms of action shape, and are shaped by, norms, and they also affect one another by influencing women's visibility in public life in different ways.

4.5 Expanding solutions to focus on gender norm change in local politics

Initiatives to address gender norms, including via development cooperation, are growing; however, these are not always well connected to traditional governance interventions. Governance work tends to focus on initiatives to promote individual empowerment, civic education, skills/training efforts and system-level changes, such as quotas and legal protections. Norms-based programming tends to be located in the gender equality and health fields, and largely focuses on changing the attitudes and behaviours of collective groups in society, addressing how individuals and collective groups interact.

While the literature on programming to promote women's political participation in local politics is limited, existing examples offer some insights. Further to the strategies already outlined, working with groups of women in a peer learning, collaborative environment seems to be more effective than working with individual women, and interventions should address a combination of factors: capacities, resources and social norms (Combaz, 2018). Mentoring can be effective in increasing women's capabilities for political participation, especially when the programme is part of a broader group of interventions on women's political empowerment (Combaz, 2018; Ceciarini, 2021; Garcia, 2021).

Successful peer learning programmes include the Dominica Association of Local Community Authorities, an ongoing, long-term programme for women in district council associations and local village councils, and the Women as Local Legislators project in Maharashtra, India (2019–2020), which was supported by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, with 70% of the trainees reporting more confidence to exercise their local government responsibilities (Combaz, 2018). Another example is the flagship Amujae Initiative by the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Center for Women and Development (2021), which combines leadership training and networking for public sector women leaders across Africa.

It is important to bring together multiple sectors and stakeholders, including political parties, local government associations and community groups (Combaz, 2018). For example, UN Women's multi-donor Fund for Gender Equality in Asia-Pacific was successful because it focused on engaging family and community support for women's political participation. Similarly, the 'We Know Politics' project collaborated with women's groups and non-governmental organisations to increase public support for women's participation

> " It is important to bring together multiple sectors and stakeholders, including political parties, local government associations and community groups.

in Africa. This included targeting specific districts in Ghana, which led to an increase in women's participation in local politics (Amponsah and Boateng, 2021).

Recognising and addressing multiple inequalities is also crucial, and may involve combined interventions to promote legal reforms and transforming institutions (Combaz, 2018). For example, UN Women supported a comprehensive programme to support women with different types of disabilities in Moldova who now plan to run for local elections. In the United Republic of Tanzania, UN Women worked with partners to promote inclusive gender mainstreaming in elections, which resulted in the use of tactile ballots and a Legal Aid Act to formally support people with disabilities (UN Women, 2019).

For effective long-term, transformative norm change, it is also crucial to engage men (Cislaghi, 2018; Combaz, 2018). For example, in Galle Toubaaco, a rural village in Senegal, Tostan's Community Empowerment Programme engaged men and women together in transformative human rights education, which contributed to a norm-shift in the community from local political decision-making being only the purview of male elders to women being active and, crucially, welcomed in political participation (Cislaghi, 2018).

5 Conclusion

This report has explored the connections between studies on gender norms and local governance. The existing limited research dedicated to explicit analysis of gender norms shows that women in local politics experience similar barriers to women in national politics, especially around leadership. However, further research is needed on how these norms shape different levels and forms of political institutions, and how they interact with other forms of political activism, not least through social movements (Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez et al. 2021). ALIGN's forthcoming work led by partners across different global contexts aims to expand learning in this space.

Some potential strategies for change in this space include: gender quotas, gender-sensitive programmes, electoral system change, actions to support gender equality within party processes and support for women's associations and women's movements. Further research should explore these efforts in terms of their potential impact on the local level.

There is a particular gap in knowledge and a nascent area of study on the dynamics of gender norms in local politics around the world. Key research questions to help progress this work include:

1. **How do gender norms shape political spaces in a unique way across various levels of governance?**

Comparative research could develop a deeper understanding of gender norms at different levels of politics, and examine the interplay between institutional designs and reforms that lead towards gender transformative outcomes. It is crucial to identify how normative barriers and opportunities are different at different levels of politics.

2. **In what ways might efforts to support gender equality and transform norms in general support inclusive politics at all levels?**

There is evidence that participation in sub-national politics supports women's increased political participation in national level. However, more research into relationship between local and national politics and its opposite directionality is needed. This is especially to better understand ways that more context-specific action might be beneficial and whether some forms of governance are more conducive to reflecting and prompting norm change, and, if so, why?

3. **How are gender norms in local politics reflected in and shaped by political parties?**

Political parties are powerful institutions across different contexts and thus it is crucial to understand how gender norms are embedded in local politics through the actions and designs of political parties, and how this shapes different institutions of government. Given the historic and ongoing importance of feminist and women's movements, particular attention should be paid to the roles of women's associations and organising within these institutions.

4. **How can development programmes, including those focused on governance support and reform, better address gender norms in local politics?**

The recent international database run by UN Women (2022b) offers an opportunity for governments, development practitioners and researchers to monitor and consider barriers and opportunities for women's participation in local politics. It is crucial to further investigate how the existing and future evidence can be used for programming across the current silos.

5. **How do gender norms, in their intersections with other forms of oppression and marginalisation, shape local political representation and institutions?**

Due to insufficient data on the experiences of women in their diversity, quantitative and qualitative studies and supportive programming and action research are required to better understand and address the experiences of marginalised women in local politics, and to ensure studies on gender and governance promote context-specific learning with sufficient attention to diverse experiences.

6. **How do or can men challenge gender norms in order to make local political institutions more inclusive?**

Feminist scholars and activists have focused heavily on researching how women can change or be supported in changing patriarchal institutions and systems. However, not enough attention has been put into understanding barriers and enablers for men's engagement in transforming political institutions. More research should be done towards understanding under which conditions men take on a critical role in driving change and how these conditions and strategic can be replicated or supported.

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About ALIGN

ALIGN is a digital platform and programme of work that is creating a global community of researchers and thought leaders, all committed to gender justice and equality. It provides new research, insights from practice, and grants for initiatives that increase our understanding of – and work to change – discriminatory gender norms. Through its vibrant and growing digital platform, and its events and activities, ALIGN aims to ensure that the best of available knowledge and resources have a growing impact on harmful gender norms.

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