

## The Role of Women in Political Participation in Cambodia: A Case Study of Svay Rieng Province

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### ABSTRACT

The government considers women as the backbone of Cambodia's economy and society. Despite a good sign, the female parliamentary representation in Svay Rieng fluctuated in the last three mandates (60% in 2008 and 2013, 80% in 2018, and 60% in 2023). The study aims to investigate the “socioeconomic”, “traditional-cultural”, “family”, and “personal” factors affecting gender roles in political involvement in Svay Rieng province, to assess perceptions and attitudes regarding women's political engagement. A mixed-methods approach was utilized, administering surveys to 119 participants and semi-structured interviews with 8 women actively participating in politics and leadership roles, using snowball sampling. The findings emphasize 1) Family-factors (domestic responsibilities, violence, and lack of support) hinder women's political participation the most, 2) Personal factors: limited education and self-confidence, 3) Socio-economic obstacles (the social devaluation of women, violence against women, limited outreach initiatives, and the impact of economic crises), and 4) Traditional customs, cultural norms including prescribed gender roles further contribute to the challenges faced by women in politics. Despite these obstacles, the study identifies positive perceptions and attitudes towards women's political participation. Participants underlined the need to empower women at both the national and sub-national levels, as well as fostering capacity development and extending possibilities. The recommendations include adopting gender equality legislation, increasing awareness, improving capacity-building programs, providing supportive infrastructure, engaging male allies, promoting cooperation, and assuring long-term commitment. A future study should look at additional elements that may impact women's political engagement, as well as evaluate the efficiency of existing policies for empowering women in Svay Rieng.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Women face barriers to political involvement across the globe in the twenty-first century [1]. Women's political engagement varies throughout the world, and it has become an essential component of current development and governance discourse. Despite international organizations' calls for women's political empowerment, research consistently shows that in many parts of the world, women remain on the margins of politics, with low participation in government structures and the democratic process [2] [3]

The representation system as a modern form of democracy aims to provide equal access and opportunities for all citizens in politics. However, political reality shows that women occupy a small proportion of political positions. This discrepancy can be attributed to several factors such as “perception of politics” Many women view politics as a “dirty” field, which discourages their participation. “patriarchal culture” Societal norms and a patriarchal culture often place women in lower positions, perpetuating their underrepresentation in politics [4].

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU] (2017) annual report, the global average proportion of women serving in national parliaments increased from 22.6% in 2015 to 23.3% at the end of 2016. Women had 16.8% of the parliamentary seats worldwide 10 years ago; in that time, they had increased by 6.5 percentage points. However, the rate of progress has slowed down recently, emphasizing the need for persistent work to achieve gender parity in politics [5].

Some women from all around the world have been able to speak in Parliament and make decisions for themselves at a certain sociopolitical level. There were just a relatively small percentage of 23.3% of female parliamentary seats worldwide in 2017 [1]. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) center on the transformational promise of leaving no one behind (LNOB) to achieve gender equality. Persistent discrimination leaves people behind; in particular, gender discrimination marginalizes and excludes individuals, families, and entire communities [6][7][8].

Cambodia held its 3<sup>rd</sup> parliamentary election in July 2023 after the Paris Peace Agreement signed in 1991. Even after the peace deal was signed more than a decade ago, democracy in Cambodia is still in turmoil. Despite some challenges from the threat of outright war, the lack of justice and accountability for war criminals means that the prospect of long-term peace is also distant, and many perpetrators of Cambodia's genocide continue to rule with impunity, while the political system is paralyzed and ordinary people live in fear, and despite cultural and political constraints, women are leading many important initiatives that promote good governance and peacebuilding [9].

Two hundred thousand people were executed without a trial between 1975 and 1979, and an additional 1.5 million people (of an 8 million-person population) [9] to roughly 1.7 million people [10] perished from malnutrition, overwork, or disease during the long-running civil war in Cambodia, which left the nation reverting to its pre-Khmer Rouge era. The effects of the Cambodian wars were not gender-neutral. Women fighters were less likely to be killed in direct battle since they typically served as propagandists, weapon bearers, or medics, putting them in the rear of the fighting parties. Following the conflict, women accounted for 60% to 64 % of all adults [9].

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The Kingdom of Cambodia was under French colonial rule from 1863 to 1953. During the reign of King Sisowath, a Royal Decree dated March 18, 1913, decided to establish a 39-member Consultative Assembly representing 10 provinces. This is the first sign of the birth of parliament. In the National Assembly 1958-1962, when Cambodian women had the first right to vote and stood for election [11].

For the first time in Cambodian history, women may democratically represent their communities by holding local political office. While women make up a tiny proportion of elected communal candidates, their devotion and performance may potentially have beneficial outcomes in the 2006 commune elections, encouraging others to run if there is enough political party support [9].

According to Phillips (2020), in a nation with few female politicians, Cambodia stands out as a country where strong cultural limits and hierarchies oppress and limit their political potential. In other words, women's exclusion from political arenas is frequently the outcome of dividing men and women into two, mostly stereotypical, binary categories; a categorization that serves as the foundation for the two sexes' hierarchization. While Cambodian males tend to conform to the image of a politician, women frequently fail to persuade as political players and appear to be second-class citizens with no influence on public policy. Stereotypes and hierarchies, therefore, change the ideals of equality upon which democracy is founded [12]. From 8% in 2002 to 14.6% in 2007 and nearly 18% in 2012, the percentage of women elected to commune councils grew. Women made up 12.6% of district/khan councilors and 10.1% of municipal and provincial councilors [13].

Despite a modest improvement, the proportion of women in government institutions is still quite low. In areas where historical social structures are prevalent and change is partially resisted, women in politics continue to encounter formidable obstacles. All components of politics are changing, but because gendered aspects of inclusion, participation, and fair treatment are stuck in *patrimonial politics, electoral systems, and party politics*, they may be more challenging to accomplish [14] [13].

According to Comfrel (2011), significant improvement in women's participation in decision-making at all governmental levels has been made by the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA). Between 1993 and 2003, the proportion of female legislators in the National Assembly increased by around 13%. Despite the encouraging trend that saw a steady growth in the proportion of women in The National Assembly throughout the mandate, concerns remain about the underrepresentation of women in this body. Gender equality in political empowerment regarding elected politicians has not yet been attained in Cambodia [10]. The number of female legislators kept declining since the 5<sup>th</sup> mandate (2013) from 20.32% [15] to 15.2% in 2018 [16] and remarkably reached the lowest of 12.8% in 2023 [3].

The Rectangular Strategy-Phase IV (RS-IV), which lays out a precise plan and policy framework for growth, employment, equity, and efficiency has been adopted by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC). This will serve as the foundation for the Cambodia Vision 2050. To ensure that *no one is left behind*, the government has linked the RS-IV and the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) (2019–2023) to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, national policies, government reforms, sectoral frameworks, the

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rule of law, and the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Their purpose is to demonstrate the government's commitment to advancing gender equality in all sectors and at all levels as well as to promoting advancement and society [7].

Women, who were formerly thought of as the backbone of the economy and society [1] [7] now have political power in most of the world's countries. Historically women had contributed significantly to the formation of society. It is well-recognized that women have different positions in society and are more likely to hold political, religious, and philosophical beliefs. To enable women to enter politics, communal structure, and women's politics were given a platform in the conversation [1].

Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) has developed its five-year strategic plan Neary Rattanak V (2019-2023) focuses on promoting gender mainstreaming in policies, strategic plans, and development programs across all sectors and at all levels, especially in key strategic areas related to the economy, education, health, legal protection, governance and climate change. In Cambodia, the situation for women's empowerment and gender equality is steadily becoming better. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), gender disparities have decreased in Cambodia, which is now ranked 89th out of 153 nations in 2019 as opposed to 108th out of 142 in 2014 [7].

Women politicians and activists of the main opposition party were disempowered and obstructed from engaging in the political process and the elections, ban of women opposition politicians from participating in the 2018 elections, and an environment of fear and restrictions to freedom of expression [17].

There are two reasons to support gender equality. First and foremost, social justice and human rights are at stake when it comes to women and men having equal rights, opportunities, and responsibilities. Furthermore, increased gender equality is both a requirement for and a reliable indication of sustainable people-centered development. In addition to being important for social justice, women's and men's perspectives, interests, needs, and priorities must be taken into account since doing so will enhance development processes [18]. Moreover, to guarantee women's complete rights to education and access to opportunities in the personal, professional, and political domains, cultural norms and presumptions must also be altered [19]. Several causes have impacted the involvement of women in politics in Cambodia. Because of gender norms and preconceptions, women in Cambodia have historically had difficulty rising to positions of leadership [20].

Research on gender and democratic changes in Cambodia shows that policy pledges are either not implemented at all or are nested in high politics with entrenched interests, which is detrimental to gender equality, as Kim and Öjendal noted in their study. Local government is one possible exception, and many women view it as the ideal "entrance point" for pursuing a career in politics. The political parties' organizational structure and politics will determine how well women can advance in politics [13]. Women *facing violence* against them in politics have little help from think tanks, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and other sources (VAWIP) [17]. Since women's participation in politics does not provide equality right away, achieving gender equality in politics is a difficult process [21].

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Despite encouraging evidence of progress toward greater gender equality, there is still insufficient representation of women in political decision-making bodies. As existing (gendered) power structures are deeply ingrained and difficult to change, much alone eliminate, gendered expressions of ideas and objectives are not as persuasive [22]. Social standards and attitudes that limit what women may achieve and become while elevating and empowering males are prevalent [23].

In 2020, the total population in Svay Rieng province was 653,766, of which 336,638 (51.50%) were women, and the sex ratio was 106.15. There were 16.69% female heads of households, out come a total of 156,051 households. The literacy rate for those aged between 18 to 44 was 94.8%, for females 94.6% in 2014, and the literacy rate in 2015 was 95.10%, for females 97.17% [24].

Number of female parliaments representative in Svay Rieng province fluctuated from 3 (60%) in 2008 [25] and 2013 [15] to 4 (80%) in 2018 [16] to 3 (60%) in 2023 [3]. The number of women represented as members of parliament shows a positive sign of women's role in political participation in Svay Rieng, but the number of females elected to provincial councilors is still under representative which is only (21.73%) 5 out of 23 in 2024 [26].

### Research Objectives

This study examines the challenges and prospects of women's roles in political participation in Svay Rieng province of Cambodia. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To investigate the barriers faced by women in Svay Rieng province regarding their political participation.
2. To explore the perceptions and attitudes of women and key stakeholders towards women's political participation in Svay Rieng province.

### Research Framework

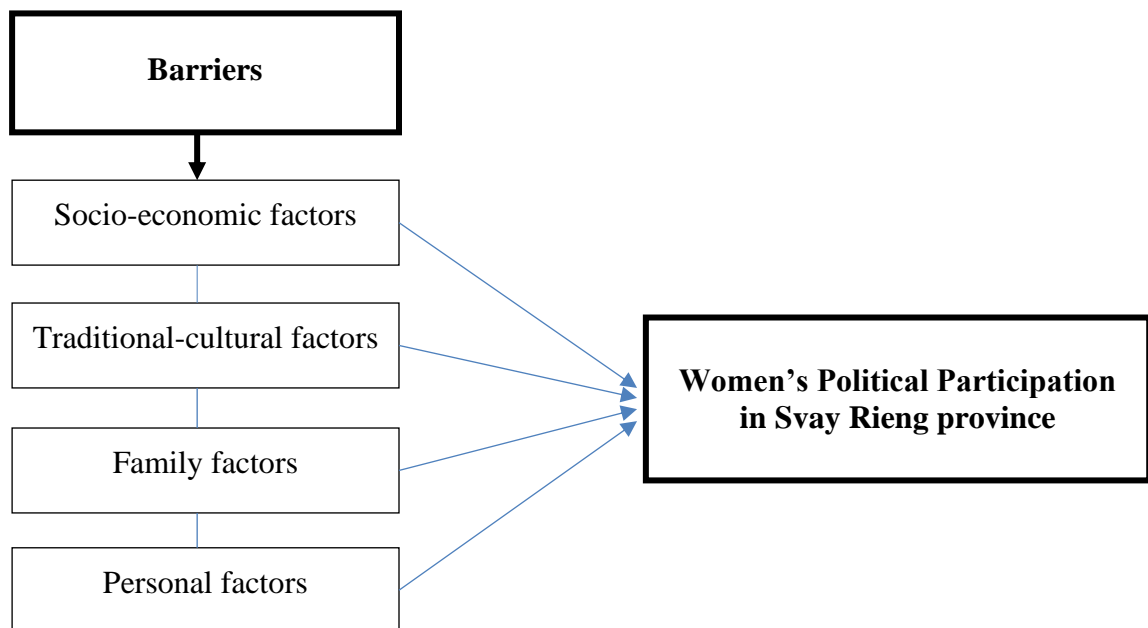


Figure 1. Research Framework

## **Operational Definition**

*Political Participation:* According to Igwe (2002), political engagement refers to an individual's level and kind of involvement in the government and associated institutions of society. In an active form, it entails taking part in political campaigns and debates, going to political party cause or strategy meetings, voting a ballot, running for office, and holding positions in the administration and party, and Okolie's (2004) among other things, freedom of expression, association, and influence over the decision-making process are all included. As are the rights to demand improved working conditions, higher salaries, and better social and health services [27].

*Gender equality* frequently rests on perceptions of social justice that are biased against women because they are based on tradition, custom, religion, or culture. It is seen as inappropriate to apply equity in the context of women's advancement. The definition of equality was decided upon in the 1995 Beijing summit. Gender equality guarantees that a person's chances, rights, and obligations are not based on their gender. It does not suggest that men and women will become the same; instead, it emphasizes the need for parity and balance as well as equal involvement in setting development objectives. Because men and women have different roles and responsibilities, equality includes acknowledging and resolving the differences in views, interests, needs, and priorities [18].

## **Statement of Problems**

Worldwide progress in women's rights and political empowerment has not prevented women in Svay Rieng from facing substantial obstacles to active political involvement. This causes a gender gap in local government, and women's underrepresentation in political decision-making impedes effective representation, which breeds a lack of responsiveness to gender-related issues and a democratic deficit. Gender stereotypes, discrimination, and resource scarcity are examples of structural and socio-cultural hurdles that prevent meaningful involvement and call for targeted remedies. The absence of beneficial institutional mechanisms, such as capacity-building programs and gender-sensitive policies, further impedes women's presence and impact. The absence of thorough data and research on women's political engagement in the province hinders evidence-based measures aimed at enhancing women's access and involvement.

## **2. METHOD**

### **Research Design**

With the research community's acceptance of mixed methods growing, they are today regarded as the third biggest research paradigm. The goal of mixed methods research is to produce a more comprehensive and wide-ranging understanding of an issue by integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies into a single study [28].

A non-probability sampling technique called "snowball sampling" involves enlisting new units into the sample through the recruitment of existing units. When researching individuals with certain characteristics who may be hard to find otherwise, snowball sampling can be a helpful method (e.g., persons with a rare condition). Snowball sampling, sometimes referred to as network sampling or chain sampling, starts with one or more

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research participants. Subsequently, it proceeds based on recommendations from the individuals involved. This procedure is repeated until the desired sample or a saturation point is reached [29] [27].

**Target Population and Sampling Strategies**

This study used mixed techniques, including semi-structured interviews with eight randomly chosen women from the participant group and quantitative methods utilizing 5-Likert scale surveys. Participants in a descriptive study design were issued survey questionnaires using Google Forms, and 119 replies were received. For this investigation, the researcher employed both primary and secondary data. Secondary data were gathered from a range of accessible sources, including books, websites, research projects, journals, and articles.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The questionnaires are used for recording information on the barriers faced by women in Svay Rieng province regarding their political participation. To interpret and examine how descriptive statistics were used to determine the frequency, percentage (%), mean (M), and standard deviation (SD).

**Limitation**

Number of respondents particularly females cannot represent the population as a whole and is conducted only in one of the provinces in Cambodia. Relied on a combination of targeted and snowball sampling.

**Demographic Profile**

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

Demographic variables	Category	Frequency	Valid Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	56	47.1%
	Female	60	50.4%
Age	Rather no disclose	3	2.5%
	20 - 29 years old	83	69.7%
	30 - 39 years old	15	12.6%
	40 - 49 years old	17	14.3%
	50 - 59 years old	4	3.4%
Marital status	Single	82	68.9%
	Married	36	30.3%
	Rather no disclose	1	0.8%
Work experiences	Less than 5 years	82	68.9%
	5-10 years	15	12.6%
	11-20 years	12	10.0%
	20+	10	8.4%
Education qualification	High school	11	9.2%
	Associate’s degree	2	1.7%
	Bachelor’s degree	79	66.4%
	Master’s degree	23	19.3%
	PhD/candidates	4	3.4%
<b>Total</b>		<b>119</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 1 displays the respondents' demographic characteristics. The information includes specifics on age, gender, job history, marital status, and educational background. There were 119 participants, of which 60 (50.4%) were women, and 3 (2.5%) anonymous. There was age diversity, with the majority sample consisting of 20-29 (69.7%), 82 (68.9%) not married, and 1 (0.8%) wished not to show the identity of marital status. There were 10 (8.4%) had over 20 years of experience, followed by those experienced between 11-20 years 12 (10%), 15 (12.6%) had 5-10 years experienced. Of all the respondents, there were 82 (68.9%) had less than 5 years of experience.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Barriers to Women's Political Participation in Svay Rieng Province, Cambodia

##### 3.1.1 Socio-economic factors

Table 2. socio-economics factors barrier women's political participation in Svay Rieng province, Cambodia

Indicators / Statements	Mean	Level Description	Std	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %
Society does not value women	2.51	Moderate Disagreement	1.24	23.5	38.7	4.2	30.3	3.4
Violence against women in society	2.79	Moderate Disagreement	1.27	20.2	28.6	6.7	40.3	4.2
Violence against politics discourages women from participating in politics	3.12	Moderate Agreement	1.16	5.9	31.9	18.5	31.1	12.6
There are few outreach activities to promote women in society	3.43	Moderate Agreement	.96	1.7	22.7	11.8	58.0	5.9
Fund: no funds to support women's activities in politics	3.37	Moderate Agreement	.92	2.5	15.1	31.9	42.9	7.6
Socio-economic crisis makes women reluctant to think about politics	3.21	Moderate Agreement	1.05	5.0	24.4	21.0	42.9	6.7
Lack of access to financial resources and the right to make legal decisions	3.01	Moderate Agreement	1.06	5.9	31.9	22.7	33.6	5.9
More socially polluted information on social media	3.67	Moderate Agreement	1.08	4.2	15.1	9.2	52.1	19.3
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.08</b>	<b>Moderate Agreement</b>	<b>1.085</b>					

##### *Descriptive Statistics*

Table 2 illustrates the socioeconomic factors barrier to women's political participation in Svay Rieng province, Cambodia. To examine the socioeconomic barriers to women's political engagement in Cambodia's Svay Rieng province, descriptive data were computed. Each indicator's mean score was calculated to give an idea of the research participants' average degree of agreement or disagreement.

A mean score of 2.51 suggested that there was a substantial degree of disagreement over the value that society put on women. Similarly, with a mean score of 2.79, there was a moderate degree of disagreement about violence against women in society. These findings

suggest that participants perceive these factors as significant challenges to women's political participation. In contrast, indicators such as violence against politics discouraging women from participating, lack of outreach activities to promote women, and the absence of funds to support women's activities in politics received mean scores indicating a moderate level of agreement (3.12, 3.43, and 3.37, respectively). These results suggest that participants generally recognize these challenges and their impact on women's political engagement. A mean score of 3.21 was also found for the socioeconomic crisis and its impact on women's unwillingness to participate in politics, suggesting a modest degree of agreement among participants. This result implies that there is a noticeable effect of the crisis on women's political engagement. Moreover, the lack of access to financial resources and the right to make legal decisions received a mean score of 3.01, indicating a moderate level of agreement regarding the existence of these barriers. Additionally, the indicator measuring the impact of socially polluted information on social media obtained a mean score of 3.67, indicating a moderate level of agreement that this factor affects women's political participation.

The descriptive statistics conclude by demonstrating the various socioeconomic challenges that women in Svay Rieng province face, including violence, societal attitudes, a lack of financial support, limited outreach programs, socioeconomic crises, restricted access to resources and decision-making, and the influence of social media. These findings demonstrate how important it is to address these problems to promote gender equality and women's political participation in the region.

### 3.1.2 Traditional, customs and cultural factors

Table 3. Traditional, customs and cultural factors barrier women’s political participation in Svay Rieng province, Cambodia

Indicators / Statements	Mean	Level Description	Std	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %
A better place for women is the home/women rotate around the stove	2.05	Moderate Disagreement	1.07	32.8	48.7	1.7	14.3	2.5
A cake can never be bigger than its basket	2.18	Moderate Disagreement	1.08	25.2	52.9	3.4	15.1	3.4
Arranged marriage (Parents arranged marriage for their daughters)	2.37	Moderate Disagreement	1.11	20.2	47.1	11.8	16.8	4.2
Cultural and religious discrimination	2.38	Moderate Disagreement	1.08	18.5	49.6	9.2	20.2	2.5
<b>Overall</b>	<b>2.25</b>	<b>Moderate Disagreement</b>	<b>1.08</b>					

#### *Descriptive Statistics:*

Table 3 displays the traditional, customs and cultural factors barrier women’s political participation in Svay Rieng province, Cambodia. In Svay Rieng province, Cambodia, traditional, customary, and cultural variables that hinder women's political involvement were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Each indicator's mean score was determined, revealing the average degree of agreement or disagreement among research participants.

With a mean score of 2.05., the results show a considerable degree of disagreement about the idea that women belong in the house and that their tasks are centered upon domestic duties. Similarly, there was a moderate amount of disagreement shown by the mean score of 2.18 for the assumption that "a cake can never be bigger than its basket". These results imply that most participants disagree with these conventional beliefs and practices that might restrict women. Additionally, a moderate amount of disagreement was indicated by the indicator about planned marriages, when parents arrange marriages for their daughters, which had a mean score of 2.37. This shows that participants may not be very in favor of arranged weddings, which might affect women's political participation and autonomy. Furthermore, a mean score of 2.38 was assigned to the existence of prejudice based on culture and religion, suggesting a considerable degree of disagreement. This implies that participants are aware of the existence of behaviors that discriminate against women in politics based on cultural and religious differences.

All things considered, the descriptive data point to several traditional, cultural, and customary elements that provide obstacles for women seeking political engagement in Cambodia's Svay Rieng region. These include ideas about women's duties in the house, the idea that they shouldn't cross certain lines, the custom of arranged marriages, and prejudice based on culture and religion. A considerable degree of disagreement among participants with these criteria is shown by the overall mean of 2.25. These results highlight how important it is to solve these issues and advance gender equality to increase women's political participation in the area.

### 3.1.3 Family factors

Table 4. Family factors barrier women's political participation in Svay Rieng Province, Cambodia

Indicators / Statements	Mean	Level Description	Std	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %
Women have to organize and manage household chores	3.19	Moderate Agreement	1.15	6.7	29.4	10.1	45.4	8.4
Women have responsibilities to be pregnant, give birth, breastfeed, and take care of their children	3.63	Moderate Agreement	1.08	5.0	15.1	7.6	55.5	16.8
Domestic violence poses a major obstacle	3.72	High Agreement	1.03	2.5	14.3	12.6	49.6	21.0
Poor living conditions	3.49	Moderate Agreement	.94	3.4	13.4	21.8	52.9	8.4
Lack of motivation/support	3.91	High Agreement	.90	3.4	5.0	10.1	59.7	21.8
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.59</b>	<b>Moderate Agreement</b>	<b>1.02</b>					

#### *Descriptive Statistics:*

Table 4 shows family factors barrier to women's political participation in Svay Rieng province, Cambodia. Descriptive statistics were employed to examine the family-related barriers to women's participation in politics in Svay Rieng province, Cambodia. Mean scores

were calculated for each indicator, providing insight into the average level of agreement or disagreement among the study participants.

The findings show that participants view women's duties in coordinating and overseeing household tasks as important, with an average score of 3.19. This suggests that participants recognize the burden placed on women in managing domestic tasks within the family. Similarly, the indicator related to women's responsibilities for pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and childcare received a mean score of 3.63, indicating a moderate level of agreement. This suggests that participants acknowledge the traditional expectations placed on women regarding reproduction and childcare within the family. Moreover, women's political participation was seen as being greatly hindered by domestic violence, as evidenced by a mean score of 3.72 showing a high level of agreement. This shows that the participants acknowledge how domestic violence affects women's participation in political activities. The measure tied to inadequate living conditions had an average of 3.49, showing a moderate level of consensus. This suggests that participants recognize the influence of unfavorable living conditions within the family context on women's political participation. Additionally, the lack of motivation and support was identified as a significant factor hindering women's political participation, with a mean score of 3.91. This indicates a high level of agreement among participants regarding the importance of motivation and support from family members in facilitating women's engagement in political activities.

Overall, the descriptive statistics highlight several family factors that challenge women's political participation in Svay Rieng province, Cambodia. These factors include the perception of women's responsibilities in managing household chores, societal expectations regarding reproduction and childcare, the prevalence of domestic violence, poor living conditions, and the lack of motivation and support within the family. The mean scores indicate varying levels of agreement among participants for each factor, with the highest level of agreement observed for the lack of motivation/support. Addressing these family factors is crucial for promoting gender equality and enhancing women's political engagement in the region.

### 3.1.4 Personal factors

Table 5. Personal factors barrier women’s political participation in Svay Rieng Province, Cambodia

Indicators / Statements	Mean	Level Description	Std	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %
Access to low education, women dare not participate in politics	3.52	Moderate Agreement	1.00	1.7	21.8	10.1	55.5	10.9
Lack of self-confident	3.73	High Agreement	.88	2.5	10.1	10.1	66.4	10.9
Little experience in politics	3.78	High Agreement	.71	8	5.9	16.0	68.9	8.4
Unfavorable health	3.36	Moderate Agreement	.95	8	25.2	16.8	51.3	5.9
Personal views on politics	3.49	Moderate Agreement	.76		11.8	31.9	51.3	5.0
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.576</b>	<b>High Agreement</b>	<b>2.11</b>					

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for personal factors that challenge women's political participation in Svay Rieng province, Cambodia. The indicators examined in the table include access to low education, lack of self-confidence, little experience in politics, unfavorable health, and personal views on politics.

For the indicator "Access to low education, women dare not to participate in politics," the mean is 3.52, indicating a moderate agreement. A standard deviation of 1.00 indicates that the replies are not all the same. 10.1% agree, 21.8% are unbiased, 1.7% highly agree, and 55.5% strongly agree. With a mean score of 3.73, the indication "Lack of self-confidence" exhibits excellent agreement. A standard deviation of 0.88 suggests a limited level of variability. 2.5% of individuals fall into Category D, while 10.1% fall into Categories N and A each, and 66.4% fall into Category SA. Similarly, there is strong agreement with an average of 3.78 for the metric "Limited political experience." The standard deviation is 0.71, suggesting relatively low variation. The percentages of respondents in the D, N, A, and SA categories are 8%, 5.9%, 16.0%, and 68.9% respectively. For the indicator "Unfavorable health," the mean is 3.36, representing a moderate agreement. There is some variety, as seen by the 0.95 standard deviation. Respondent percentages in the D, N, A, and SA categories are, in order, 8%, 25.2%, 16.8%, and 51.3%. Lastly, the indicator "Personal views on politics" has a mean of 3.49, indicating a moderate agreement. The standard deviation is 0.76, suggesting relatively low variation. The percentages of respondents in the D, N, A, and SA categories are 11.8%, 31.9%, 51.3%, and 5.0% respectively.

The overall mean for all indicators is 3.576, indicating a high agreement. The overall standard deviation is 2.11. These statistics provide insights into the perceptions and experiences of women regarding personal factors that affect their political participation in Svay Rieng province, Cambodia.

### 3.2. Findings from the interviews

Table 6. Demographic of Women Actively Participating in Politics and Leadership Roles

Participants Code	Gender	Education	Position	Years of experiences
P1	Female	High School	Head of the department	25 Years
P2	Female	Master	Deputy District Officer	10 Years
P3	Female	Master	Deputy District Office	16 Years
P4	Female	Pursuing Master	Deputy District Administrator	10 Years
P5	Female	Bachelor	Commune Clerk	15 Years
P6	Female	Bachelor	Provincial Councilor	5 Years
P7	Female	Bachelor	Commune Council	3 Years
P8	Female	Bachelor	Member of Advisory Council	4 Years

Table 6 presents the demographic information of women actively participating in politics and leadership roles. All participants (P1-P8) are female (100%) were interviewed. Overall, the participants' education qualifications varied from high school to completed bachelor's, and one of them is pursuing a master's degree. The positions held by these women percipients include Head of the department, Deputy District Officer, Deputy District Administrator, Commune Clerk, Provincial councilor, Commune council member, and

Member of the advisory council. The years of experience in their respective roles range from 3 to 25 years. These women represent a diverse group of individuals contributing to political and leadership positions in their community.

### **3.2.1. Perceptions and Attitudes towards Women's Political Participation in Svay Rieng Province, Cambodia.**

Women should be supported in politics and the support both at the national level and sub-national level. Women have developed their capacity and access to expanding opportunities in the public and political spheres. "I believe that promoting women's political participation is crucial for the promotion and change of attitudes among the public, both men and women, as leaders and stakeholders." (P1)

The significance of women's political participation, highlighting their inherent flexibility, adaptability, and understanding of the needs and experiences of other women, and implores women to engage in the political sphere and uplift one another. "To counter obstacles, I fervently urge women to actively participate in politics, providing support and encouragement to one another while fearlessly confronting challenges." (P2).

Encouraging women to participate in politics also gives them excellent chances to demonstrate their leadership abilities. A participant emphasizes the significance of enabling women to assume leadership positions, as this facilitates the use of their distinct viewpoints and backgrounds, hence cultivating a more comprehensive and varied approach to decision-making. "I think that participating actively in politics benefits society as a whole and reduces discrimination against women." P3.

On a personal level, I wholeheartedly encourage and support other women and girls to actively engage in politics (P4). As asserted, women's participation serves as a powerful model, motivating others to step forward and challenge the notion that their roles are confined to the kitchen. She emphasizes the importance of granting women more opportunities and creating an inclusive environment to dismantle barriers and promote a society where women's voices are heard and valued.

I support women to participate in politics, particularly my daughter who I always stand behind and encourage her to participate in politics as I do (P5). I would suggest that political parties should continue to encourage women's political participation, while the government should support women at all levels. One of the respondents urges girls and women to be strong, brave, and showcase their abilities, rejecting the notion that women are limited to domestic roles.

As (P6) expresses, I support any of my relative women to participate in politics because I want to see the number of women's political participation increase from time to time (P6). She emphasizes the need to implement policies following political party principles, create job opportunities, and support families and the nation.

I would encourage other women or girls to participate in politics help our community, and encourage them to pursue their studies as high as possible (P7). On a personal level, (P7) believes that women's participation in politics is crucial for community development and urges women to strive for higher education.

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I encourage and support women and girls who want to participate in politics, to be brave enough, and not give up their dream if they are qualified, they must struggle persist, and study hard (P8). She emphasizes the importance of bravery, persistence, and qualification for women's political engagement. She highlights the need for women to develop themselves first and then share their experiences with others.

### **3.3.2. Discussion**

#### **Challenges for Women in Political Participation in Svay Rieng Province, Cambodia**

The barriers to women's political participation in Svay Rieng observed from the highest to the lowest were 'the family factors, personal factors, socio-economic factors, and traditional-cultural factors (see tables 4, 5, 2, 3 above).

The findings of the study are aligned with the various studies such as the problems that account for the comparatively low presence of women in politics as identified include lack of funds, negative perception of politics by women, low self-confidence, cultural and religious barriers, political violence, low level of educational attainment and marginalization in political party leadership [30]. The support for female politicians or activists is limited. Yet, they face more challenges than male politicians because female politicians or activists need to overcome many barriers to fully participate in politics especially the demands for their roles as mothers, wives or daughters-in-law in the family are also pulling them back. Violence against women in politics in Cambodia is one of the serious issues. There is limited support from educational institutions, think tanks, NGOs, and so forth for women to overcome the VAWIP. The level of available support for women is below average [17].

The progress of women is hindered by socio-economic variables [1]. Socio-economic factors impede women's political participation, Lack of adequate financial resources, and financial support from political parties is the number one factor that hinders their participation. Personal resources are not enough to win an election. from political parties as the number one factor that hinders their participation. Personal resources are not enough to win an election. A political campaign is very necessary to get the voters' support. Voter support is influenced by political campaigns. Political campaigns can influence election results by conveying the candidate's issue positions and personal characteristics to a sufficient number of voters, thereby mobilizing voter support. The participants likewise agree that Factors that Impede Women's Participation in Electoral Politics in terms of Cultural and Institutional Factors are the type of electoral system as well as the lack of quota reservations, ranked first and garnering the highest weighted mean of 2.70. About Ideological and Psychological Factors, participants agreed that how women are portrayed in the mass media impedes women's political participation. It obtained the highest weighted mean of 2.57 [27].

Although there are signs of deepened gender equality, female representation in political decision-making bodies remains inadequate. Gendered articulation of ideas and priorities has limited resonance, and established (gendered) power structures are entrenched and not easily altered, and even less so, removed [22]. Women in Cambodia face various challenges when participating in politics. Gender roles and stereotypes constrain women's ability to attain leadership positions in political structures [20]. Rural Cambodian women

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encounter issues like gender-based violence, limited education opportunities, and pressure to balance work with domestic roles, impacting their political engagement [31]. In line with Kumar (2017), there is an area in which *women* do not get a full opportunity; that is politics; women are seen in the top leadership of the political parties or the top leadership of the government, but only a few names are exposed [1]. The burgeoning number of Khmer non-governmental organizations (NGOs) addressing gender issues have provided women (in post-UNTAC Cambodia) with unprecedented opportunities to exert pressure on the state [32].

Social norms and beliefs that restrict what women can do and be, and give higher value and more power to men, are still pervasive [23]. Additionally, cultural norms and assumptions need to change to ensure women's full rights to education and access to opportunities in personal, professional, and political spheres [19]. A patriarchal society and cultural standards frequently place women in lesser positions, and their underrepresentation in politics is perpetuated. Many women also perceive politics as a "dirty" area, which discourages them from participating in it [4].

### **Perceptions and Attitudes towards Women's Political Participation in Svay Rieng Province, Cambodia**

Women's political participation in Svay Rieng is viewed and approached positively. Participants think that it is essential to back women in politics at both national and sub-national levels to encourage changes in public attitudes. They highlight the political sphere benefits from the flexibility, adaptability, and understanding of women. Promoting women's involvement in politics enables them to demonstrate their leadership skills and unique viewpoints, which ultimately benefits society and helps to decrease gender discrimination. The importance of providing personal support and encouragement to women participating in politics is highlighted, to challenge conventional gender norms and promote inclusive spaces. Political parties and the government are urged to persist in promoting women's involvement and offering assistance. Participants highlight the significance of courage, determination, qualifications, and education for women's engagement in politics, encouraging women to enhance themselves and motivate others with their journeys. In general, the conversation emphasizes the importance of women's involvement in politics and the necessity for continued support and inclusive methods to guarantee their active participation in political affairs.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

### ***Main Findings***

The research on perception and attitudes about women's involvement in politics in Svay Rieng Province, Cambodia uncovered numerous significant results. The participants ranked barriers to women's political participation in order from highest to lowest as family factors, personal factors, socio-economic factors, and traditional-cultural factors. These results are in line with earlier research that has highlighted comparable obstacles, such as insufficient funding, unfavorable views on politics, limited self-assurance, cultural and religious obstacles, political unrest, inadequate education levels, and exclusion from positions of power within political parties. Socio-economic factors were discovered to be

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obstacles to women's advancement, along with the electoral system type and the media's depiction of women, which were also recognized as hindrances to women's involvement in politics.

### ***Implications***

The findings will have a big impact on Svay Rieng Province's efforts to promote women's participation in politics. It is imperative to tackle the obstacles that have been identified, such as providing monetary assistance, altering pessimistic political beliefs, enhancing self-worth, challenging cultural norms, and preventing gender-based violence. It is imperative to tackle socio-economic concerns to create a more inclusive atmosphere that grants women equal possibilities to participate in politics. Examining how the media shapes public perceptions of women in politics and striving for impartial and truthful representations are crucial. The study also highlights how critical it is to challenge cultural conventions and assumptions that restrict women's choices and uphold gender inequity.

### ***Recommendations***

Based on the findings and implications, several recommendations can be made to enhance women's political participation in Svay Rieng Province, Cambodia:

*Financial Support:* Financial resources for women's political campaigns and activities should be made available by political parties and official government agencies. The financial obstacles preventing women from participating may be lessened with this.

*Capacity Building:* It is important to have policies and programs in place that enhance women's political literacy, leadership abilities, and self-assurance. Women can be empowered to actively participate in politics through networking opportunities, mentorship programs, and training seminars.

*Cultural and Social Change:* The stereotypes and cultural norms that limit the roles and opportunities of women should be challenged. Politics can be more inclusive if gender equality and discriminatory practices are promoted and challenged.

*Media Representation:* For women to be represented fairly and accurately in politics, media organizations must collaborate. By highlighting women's achievements and perspectives, we can challenge gender biases and inspire others. By highlighting women's achievements and perspectives, we can challenge gender biases and inspire others.

*Education and Awareness:* The empowerment of women and girls can be enhanced through improved access to education, particularly in rural areas. Campaigns promoting women's political involvement and their benefits for the whole of society should be organized.

*Legal and Policy Support:* It is important to implement and enforce policies that promote gender equality in politics. Quota systems, legislative safeguards against discrimination and violence, and the development of supportive environments for women's political engagement are all examples of this.

In summary, the perception of women's political engagement in Svay Rieng Province is beneficial, and it is acknowledged that women's involvement at all levels has to be supported and encouraged. More women participating in politics can result in a more fair

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and representative government in the province. This can be achieved by addressing the obstacles that have been identified, encouraging inclusive behaviors, and putting the suggestions into reality.

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