



Empowerment In Suspension- Developing “Deferred Empowerment” As A Theoretical Framework in Feminist Political Science

Radha

Research Scholar, Department of Continuing Education and Extension, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

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Corresponding Author: Radha

Abstract

Women's empowerment has become one of the most important subject in feminist political science. Many governments have government introduce constitution reforms, gender policies and political reservation to increase woman participation in political institutions. Although this efforts have improved women's representation, they have not always resulted in real political power or equal participation in decision making. In many cases women hold political positions but continue to face social, culture, and institutional barriers that limit their authority and influence. Existing feminist theories explain women's empowerment from different perspective, but they do not fully explain why women empowerment is often delayed even after woman archive formal political representation.

This article introduce the concept of “Deferred Empowerment” as a new theoretical framework to understand this gap between formal political inclusion and actual political power. The study uses a qualitative and conceptual research approach based on the review of feminist political theories, scholarly literature, and policy documents. It argues empowerment should not be understood only as the presence of women but also as their ability to exercise independent decision making power and influence public policy. The postponed framework explain how institution practice, social norms, and political structure can delay and restrict the process of genuine empowerment despite legal and constitutional support.

The article concluded that political representation alone cannot ensure meaningful empowerment. Instead, empowerment should be viewed as a Continuous process that require both formal inclusion and effective participation in decision making. By developing the concept of Deferred Empowerment, this study contribute a new perspective to feminist political science and provide a useful framework for future research on gender, political representation, democratic governance and women's empowerment.

Keywords: Women's Empowerment, Deferred Empowerment, Political Feminist Theories, political Representation, Gender Equality, Political Participation, and Decision-making

Introduction

Across the world the participation of women in political institutions has increased significantly over the last few decades. Constitutional reforms, gender quotes, and public policy has created new opportunities for women to enter political life. Many countries have adopted measure to promote gender equality and ensure women's participation in governance. These efforts have improved women's visibility in political institutions and strengthened there formal representation. However, increased political participation has not always resulted in equal political power. In many cases women continue to face social, culture and institutional barriers that limit their ability to influence important decisions even after obtaining political positions. The difference between political representation

and actual authority has become an important concern in feminist political science (Phillips, 1995; Pitkin, 1967) ^[19, 21].

The concept of empowerment has therefore become central to discussion on gender equality and democratic governance. Empowerment is generally understood as the process through which individuals to gain the ability to make meaningful choices, exercise their rights and influence decision that affect their lives. According to Kabeer (1999) ^[13], improvement is archived when people who were previously denied the ability to make strategic life choices gain the resources, agency and opportunities necessary to exercise those choices. Similarly, Sen (1999) ^[24] argues that development should expand people's freedom and capabilities, While Nussbaum (2000) ^[16] emphasizes that

genuine power requires both opportunities and the real ability to use them. This perspectives suggest that use empowerment is not limited to legal rights of formal position, it also includes the effective exercise of authority, participation in decision-making, and the freedom to influence political outcomes. Understanding the border meaning of empowerment is essential for examining why formal power political inclusion does not always lead to genuine political power.

The idea of empowerment has gained special importance in feminist political science because it focuses on the relationship between, gender, power, and political participation. Feminist scholars argue that democracy cannot be considered truly inclusive of women has present in political institutions but remain exclude from meaningful decision-making. From this perspective, political empowerment is not important to voting contesting election or occupying public, Instated, it's includes the ability to participate equality in political processes influence public policies, exercise independent authority without social or institutional restrictions (Phillips, 1995)^[19].

Early feminist thinkers highlighted that women's exclusion from political science deeply connected to unequal social structure and traditional roles. In, *The second sex* Simone de Beauvoir (1949) argued that women's subordinate position was not natural but socially constructed through historical and cultural practices. Similarity bell hooks (1984) emphasizes that empowerments requires the transformation of unequal power relations after than increasing women's numerical representation. Judith Butler (1990)^[4] further explain that genders identities and power structure are continuously shaped by social institutions, making formal equality alone insufficient to archive genuine empowerment. This perspective have significantly influenced feminist political science by shifting attention from women's presence in politics to the quality of their political participation. Hanna Pitkin's (1967)^[21] theory of political representation distinguished between formal representation and sub representation and Substantive representation, suggesting that holding political office does not automatically ensure the ability to influence decision. Anne Phillips (1995)^[19] also argued that political representation should provide woman with both visibility and real political voice Together, these ideas suggest that genuine power requires more than legal recognition and electoral success. It demands effective exercise of political authority, equal access to decision-making, and the removal of structural barriers that continue to limit woman's political agency. This understanding provides the foundation of examining how and why empowerment may remain incomplete despite increase political representation.

Existing research has made an important contribution to understanding women's empowerment, political participation and representation. Many scholars argue that increasing the number of women in political institutions is necessary for achieving gender equality. Study on political representation show that women often bring different experience, priorities, experiences perspective into decisions-making. Anne Phillips (1995)^[19] argue that the presence of Women political institutions important because it helps include voice that have historically been excluded from politics. Similarly, Hanna Pitkin (1967)^[21] explain that

representation should not be understood only as occupying a political positions; it should also the ability to involve the ability to act and speak of behalf of those represented.

Research on gender and quotes of women political participation has also shown that institutional reforms can increased women's entry into politics. Drude Dahlerup's work on gender quotes demonstrate that reservation policies significantly improve women's numerical representation in legislature and local governments. International studies such has women in parliament: Beyond number further suggest that women's participation can strengthen democratic governance and improve attention to social issues affecting women. Recent reports by the Economic Forum (2025)^[28] and the Inter Parliamentary Union and U.N. Women (2025) indicate that women's political representation has increased in many countries although process remains uneven across religion.

At the same time, empowerment scholars have argued that empowerment is a broader process than political inclusion alone. Kabeer (1999)^[13] emphasizes that empowerment requires resources and agency, and achievements, while Batliwala (2007)^[1] argues that empowerment involves transformation unequal power relations rather than merely improving participation. These studies collectively show that participation, representation, and legal reforms are important steps towards gender equality.

However, the existing literature still leaves an important questions unsolved: why do many women continue experience limited political authority even after gaining formal representation? Although pervious study discuss representation, participation and empowerment, they do not fully explain the process through which empowerment become delayed, restricted or suspended political institutions. This unresolved issues the create for new conceptual explanation, which the present study seeks to address.

Despite the remarkable progress made in promoting women's political participation, and empowerment. Over the past few decades, constitutional reforms, gender quotes and democratic policies have increased women's representation in political institutions across many countries. More women are now serving as legislators, ministers, local government representatives, and political readers than ever before. However, greater political representation has not always resulted greater political authority. In many cases, women continue to experience social, culture, institutional, and organizational barriers that restrict their ability to influence important political decision. This difference between political inclusion and actual decision making power raises important questions about the effectiveness of existing approaches to women's empowerment.

Existing feminist scholarship has made significant contribution to explaining empowerment through concept such as political participation, agency, equality, and institutional inclusion. Scholars including Hanna Pitkin (1967)^[21], Anne Phillips (1995)^[19], Naila Kabeer (1999)^[13] have demonstrated that's women participation and representation are essential for achieving democratic equality. Similarly, research on gender quotes and political participation has shown that legal and institutional reforms can increase women's presence in political institutions. However, these studies mainly focus on improving access

political positions and opportunities. They provide limited theoretical explanation for why women often continue to face restrictions in exercising political authority even after obtaining formal representation.

This unresolved issues reveals an important in the existing literature while current theories successfully explain women's political inclusion, they do not adequately explain the delay between formal representation and the achievement of meaningful political power. To address this gap, the present study introduce the concept of "Deferred Empowerment." The concept refers to a situation in which women receive political rights, representation, and institutional recognition but continue to experience delayed or restricted authority persistent structural, culture and political barriers. By proposing this concept as a new theoretical framework, the study seeks to expand feminist political science and provide a deeper understanding why political representation alone does not always result in genuine empowerment.

The primary aim of this study is examine the gap between formal representation and genuine representation empowerment within the field of feminist political science. While exist research has successfully explain the importance of women's political participation, representation and institutional inclusion, limited attention has been given to understand by proposing "Deferred Empowerment" as a new theoretical framework analysis the delay between women political inclusion, and their effective exercise of power.

The proposed framework argues that empowerment it should not be Views as a immediate outcome of political representation as a Continuous and dynamic process influenced by institutional practices, social norms, political structure and cultural expectations. By introducing this perspective, the study aims to extend existing feminist theories of empowerment and a contribute a deeper understanding of women's political experiences beyond numerical representation. The concept of Deferred Empowerment also provide a new analytical approach for examining the quality of women's participation in democratic institutions and the Challenges that continue limit their political agency. The article organised into several sections, following this introduction, the study reviews the existing literature on women's empowerment feminist political theory and political representation. It then presents the research objectives, research questions and methodology before developing the proposed theoretical framework the final section discuss the broader implications of Deferred Empowerment for feminist political science and democratic governance, followed by the conclusion and recommendations for future research.

Literature Review

Feminist political theories provide the intellectual foundation for understanding women's empowerment and their position within political institutions. One of the earliest and most influential contribution to feminist thought was made by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949). De Beauvoir argued that women's unequal position in society is not determined by biology but it socially and historically constructed. She explain that women have traditionally been

treated as "other," while man have been regarded as the social and political norms. This unequal relationship has shaped women's access to education, employment, leadership and political decision-making. Her work establish an important theoretical basis for understanding why women's political exclusion is rooted in long standing social structures rather than individual capability.

Building upon these ideas, bell hooks (1984) expanded from feminist theory by arguing that empowerment cannot be achieved by simply through legal equality and increased representations. In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre*, she emphasized that genuine empowerment requires transforming unequal system of power that continue marginalized women. According to hooks, feminism is not concerned with increasing women's participation in public institutions but also with challenging the social, culture, and political structure that reproduce inequality. Her perspective highlights that meaningful empowerment depends on changing power relations rather than merely numerical representation. These foundational works have significantly influenced contemporary feminist political science. They shifted academic attention from viewing women as participants in politics to examining the structural conditions that shaped political experiences. Through, de Beauvoir and hooks argue that women's Political empowerment should be understood as a process of challenging historical inequalities and transforming existing power structures. Their contributions continue to guide feminist debates on equality, representation, and political agency. However, while these theories successfully explain the historical causes of women exclusion and the importance of structural change, they provide limited explanation for why empowerment often remains incomplete even after women gain formal political representation. This limitation creates the foundation for examining later theories of political representation and empowerment in greater detail.

The theoretical foundations established by Simone de Beauvoir and bell hooks encourage feminist scholars to examine not only why women were excluded from politics but also how their participation could be made more meaningful. As a feminist political science developed, increasing attention was given to the concept of political representation and its relationship with women's empowerment scholars argued that the presence of women in political institutions is an important steps towards gender equality, but representation alone cannot guarantee genuine political influence or decision-making authority. One of the most influential contribution to this debates was made by Hanna Pitkin (1967) ^[21] in *The Concept of Representation*. Pitkins distinguished between different forms of political representation and argued that true representation is not simply about occupying an elected position. Instead, representation should actively speak for, protect and advance the interests of the people they represent. Her theory shifted the focus from numerical presence of political to the quantity and effectiveness of political representation. This distinction between Particularly significant in feminist political science, where increasing the number of women in politics does not necessarily ensure that women's are able to influence public policy or exercise independent political authority.

Building upon Pitkin's work Anne Phillips (1995) ^[19]

introduce the idea of the *politics of presence*. Phillips argued that democratic institutions become more representative when historically excluded groups, including women, are physically present with in politics decision-making bodies. She maintained that women's experiences and perspectives cannot be fully represented by others and that their direct participation is essential for democratic legitimacy. However, Phillips also acknowledged that the presence of women should not be viewed as the final objective. Genuine equality that women are able to participate meaningful, influence policy outcomes, and exercise real political power. Together, the work of Pitkin and Phillips significantly advance feminist debates on politics representation by demonstrating that numerical inclusion and substantive political influence are closely related but not identical. Their contributions provide an essential framework for understanding women's political participation while also raising further questions about why formal representation does not always result in genuine empowerment. These question naturally leads border theories of empowerment, which are discussed in the following section.

While the theories of political representation explain why women presence in political institutions is essential for democratic inclusion, they do not fully explain how representation is transformed into genuine political empowerment. This limitation encourage scholars to examine empowerment as a broader social, political, institutional process rather than as an automatic outcome of political participation. Consequently, feminist political science increasingly shifted its attention from the question of Who participates in politics to whether participation actually enables women to exercise meaningful power and make independent political choices. Among the most influential contribution to empowerment theory is the work of Naila Kabeer (1999) ^[13], who defines empowerment as the process through which individuals who have been defined the ability to make strategic life choices gain the capacity to exercise those choices, Kabeer argued that empowerment is built upon three interconnected dimensions: resources, agency and achievements. Resources provide individuals with opportunities, agency reflects their ability to make independent decision and achievements represent the outcomes of those choices. The framework suggest that political representation alone cannot be considered genuine empowerment unless women also possess the freedom and authority to influence political decision.

The capability approach developed by Amartya Sen (1999) ^[24] further strengthens this understanding by arguing that development should be evaluate to merely by the availability of rights or opportunities but by people's actual freedom to use them. Sen emphasizes that expanding human capabilities enables individuals to live the lives they value. Building upon this perspective Martha

C. Nussbaum (2000) ^[16] argues that democratic societies must ensure that individuals possess both formal rights and the practical capabilities necessary to exercise those rights effectively. Her work highlight that legal recognition without the ability to act remains incomplete from of empowerment. Together, the contributions of the Kabeer, Sen, and Nussbaum broaden the understanding of empowerment beyond political participation and formal

representation. Their theories demonstrate that genuine empowerment requires agency, freedom, and practical capability to exercise political authority. However, although this scholars explain the condition necessary for empowerment, they provide limited attention to the period between obtaining formal political representation and achieving political influence. This remaining gap directs the discussion towards the role of institutions and power structures in shaping women's political empowerment.

Although the theories of Kabeer, San, and Nussbaum provide a comprehensive understanding of empowerment by emphasizing agency, capabilities and freedom, they also suggest that empowerment cannot not be archiving in isolation from the social and political environment. Women's ability to exercise power continuously influenced by institutional, culture norms, and genderd power that shape political opportunities and decisions-making process. Consequently, feminist scholars argued that empowerment should be understood not only as an individual achievement but also as a structural and institutional process. Judith Butler (1990) ^[4] significantly expanded feminist political theory by challenging assumption that gender is a fixed or natural category. In *Gender Trouble* Butler argued that gender identities are socially produced and continuously through reinforced cultural practices, institution and political system from this perspective, political institutions are not natural spaces: they often reproduce existing gender hierarchies that influence how women are perceive, accepted, and allowed to exercise authority. Even when women obtained formal political positions, institutional exaptation traditional gender norms may continue to restrict their ability to participate equally in decision-making.

Similarly, Srilatha Batliwala (2007) ^[1] argues that empowerment is fundamentally concerned with transforming unequal power relations rather than merely increasing women participation in public life, she emphasizes that genuine empowerment requires changes in institutional practices, social attitudes, and organizational structure maintain gender inequality According to Batliwala, politics promoting women's inclusion and important but they become meaningful only when they are accompanied by changes that enable women to exercise independent authority and influence political outcomes. Together, the contributions of Butler and Batliwala demonstrate that empowerment is deeply connected to the functioning political institutions and border system of power. Their works explain why legal reforms and political representation alone cannot eliminate structural barriers that continue to save women's political experiences. These perspective strengthen the argument that empowerment is a gradual and contested process rather than an automatic consequence of political participation. At the same time, they also indicated the need examine recent empirical evidence on women's political representation and empowerment, which is discussed in the political section.

Theoretical perspectives discussion above are strongly supported by recent empirical evidences studies on women's participation and gender equality. Over the decade, international organizations have reported steady progress in increasing women's representation in political institutions through constitutional reforms, gender quotes, and democratic initiatives. These findings indicate that

significant achievement have been made in expanding women's political participation. However, they also reveal that numerical representation alone has not eliminated the inequalities that continue to affect women's ability to exercise meaningful political authority. The Global Gender Gap Report 2025 published by the World Economic Forum highlights that although many countries have improved women's access to education, employment and political participation, gender gap particularly visible in political leadership and decisions-making position. Similarly, the women political participation 2025 report prepared by UN Women and Inter-Parliamentary Union shows that women continue to be underrepresented in senior executive offices, cabinet position key policy-making institutions despite gradual improvements in Parliamentary representation. These reports suggest that women's presence in political institutions has increased more rapidly than their influence over political decision-making.

Comparable conclusion are presented in Women In Parliament: Beyond Numbers, which argues that democratic institutions should evaluate not only the number of women elected but quality of their participation and their ability to shape legislature outcomes. Likewise Gender equality and women's political participation published by UN Women emphasizes that genuine political empowerment requires supportive institutional environment, equal opportunities and effective participation in governance rather than symbolic representation alone. These studies collectively reinforce argument that political inclusion represent only one stage in the broader process of empowerment. Although recent international reports provide valuable evidence regarding the continuing challenges faced by women in politics, they primarily described existing pattern and policies outcomes rather than offering a comprehensive theoretical explanation for why political empowerment frequently remains delayed after formal representation has been archived. Consequently, while the empirical literature confirms the existence of this gap, it leaves unresolved the conceptual questions of how delay should be understood within feminist political science. This unresolved issues forms the basis for the critical discussion presented in the following section.

The existing literature provides a strong foundation for understanding women's political empowerment formal theoretical perspective. Feminist scholars have explained the historical causes of women's political exclusion, emphasized the importance of political representation and develop influential theories of empowerment, agency and capabilities. Contemporary studies and international reports have further demonstrated that women's participation in political institutions has increased across many democratic societies. Collectively, this body of literature significantly advanced feminist political science highlighting the importance of gender equality, democratic inclusion and women's political participation. Despite these importance contribution a common limitations remains within the existing scholarship. Most studies examine either women's excess to political institutions or the condition necessary for empowerment, but relatively few explain the continuing gap between formal political representation and the actual exercise of political authority. While existing theories acknowledge structural barriers, institutional equalities, and

equal power relations, they do not provide a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding why empowerment frequently remains delayed even after the women attain political office.

This limitations creates an important opportunity for further theoretical development. Building upon the insights of previous scholars, the present study proposed "Deferred Empowerment" as a conceptual framework to explain the period between political inclusion and the achievement of genuine political authority, rather than replacing existing theories the proposed framework seeks to extend them by offering deeper understanding of the processes through which institutional, social, and political constraints continue to shape women's political empowerment. The following section explains the research design and methodology adopted to develop and examine this theoretical framework.

Research Objectives

The review of existing literature demonstrates that feminist scholars have made have significant contribution to understanding women's political representation, empowerment, agency and participation. However, despite these theoretical and empirical achievements, ab important gap remain explaining why women often continue to experience political authority even after archiving formal political representation. In response to this gap the present study to seeks develop a broader conceptual understanding of women's political empowerment by proposing Deferred Empowerment as a new theoretical framework. Accordingly, the study guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the concept of women's political empowerment within the field of feminist political science
2. To critically analyse existing literature of political representation, empowerment, agency, and Feminist political theory.
3. To identified the theoretical limitations of existing approaches in explaining the gap between formal political representation and genuine political empowerment.
4. To develop the concept of Deferred Empowerment as a theoretical framework for understanding delayed political empowerment.
5. To examine the significance of proposed framework in extending contemporary feminist political science and contribution to future research on women's political empowerment.

Research Methodology

This study adopts qualitative and conceptual research design to examine the relationship between women's political representation and genuine political empowerment within the filed of the feminist political science. Rather than collecting primary data through survey, interviews, and questionnaires, this research focus on analysis existing theoretical perspective scholarly literature to develop a new conceptual framework. This study primarily concerned with understanding why formal political representation does not always result in meaningful political authority and how can this gap can be theoretically explain through the concept of Deferred Empowerment.

The research follow as an analytical and interpretative

approach. An analytical approach is used to critically examine existing theories of political empowerment, representation, agency and Feminist political thought. At the same time an interpretative approach is adopted to Understand the relationship between these concept and identity theoretical limitations that remain within the existing literature. This combination enables to study move beyond descriptive analysis develop a boarder conceptual explanation for delayed political empowerment. The study relies entirely on secondary sources of data. The primary sources including books, data, peer-reviewed journal articles, international recognised reports related to feminist political science, women's political participation, political representation and empowerment major theoretical contribution by scholars such as Simone de Beauvoir, Hanna Pitkin, Anne Phillips, bell hooks, Naila Kabeer, Judith Butler, Martha C. Nussbaum, Amartya Sen, and Srilatha Batliwala from the theoretical foundations of research. In addition, contemporary reports published by organization such as World Economic Forum (WEF), UN Women and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), are used to understand recent developments in women's political representation and gender equality. The analysis conducted through thematic and critical literature analysis. Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring themes within feminist political scholarship, including political representation, empowerment, agency, institutional barriers gender norms and democratic participation. These themes as examined comparatively to identify similarities, differences, and area of theoretical convergence. Critical literature analysis is then employed to strengthen to limitations of existing approaches and determine the weather current theories adequately explain the gap between formal political representation and genuine political empowerment. This This analytical process provides the intellectual basis for proposing Deferred Empowerment as a new theoretical framework.

The scope of this study is limited to the theoretical and conceptual dimensions of women's political empowerment within feminist political science. It focuses on explaining the relationship between political representation and political authority rather than measuring empowerment through statistical indicators or country-specific case studies. Although examples from contemporary international reports are considered where appropriate, the primary objective is to contribute to feminist political theory by developing a concept that has broader analytical relevance across different democratic contexts. Like all conceptual studies, this research has certain limitations. Since the study is based entirely on secondary sources, it does not include empirical data collected through fieldwork or interviews. Consequently, the proposed framework is intended as a theoretical contribution rather than an empirically tested model. Future research may validate and expand the concept of Deferred Empowerment by applying it to comparative case studies, national political systems, or quantitative analyses. Despite these limitations, the present methodology provides a systematic and academically rigorous foundation for developing a new theoretical perspective within feminist political science.

Developing the Deferred Empowerment Framework

1 Defining Deferred Empowerment

The preceding discussion has demonstrated that feminist political science has made significant process in explaining women's political exclusion, the importance of political representation, and the conditions necessary for empowerment. Existing theories have successfully shown that political participation, agency, institutional support and democratic inclusion are essential complements of women empowerments. However, they provide only limited explanation for a recurring phenomenon observed across many political system: women may archived formal political representation while continuing to experience restricted political authority limited decision-making power and constrained influence over public policy. This unresolved gap indicates need for a broader conceptual framework capable explaining the relationship between political inclusion and the gradual achievements of genuine political empowerment. To address limitations of the present study introduce the concept of Deferred Empowerment. The terms reference to a condition in which women obtained formal access to political institutions but are unable to exercise Substantive political authority because institutional, structural, culture organizational barriers continue limit their agency. The concept therefore shift attention from the question whether women are politically represented whether the possess the practical capacity to influence decision, shape public policy, and exercise independent leadership.

Unlike existing approaches that offend that treat political representation as the public indicator of empowerment. The concept of Deferred Empowerment recognises that empowerment are related but distinct within a political process. Formal representation creates opportunities for participation, yet these opportunities do not translating into meaningful political influence. Genuine empowerment emerges only women are able to overcome institutional constraints, challenge unequal power relations participation autonomous political actor within democratic institutions. Accordingly, Deferred Empowerment should be understood as a transitional face between formal political inclusion and genuine political empowerment. Rather than rejection existing feminist theories, the concept builds upon insights by identifying and intermediate phase that has received comparatively limited theoretical attention. By recognising this stage, the proposed framework provide a more comprehensive understanding of how women's political empowerment develops over time and why achievements political office does not necessarily guarantee the effective exercise of political power.

2. Why Does Empowerment Become Deferred?

The concept of Deferred Empowerment is based on the argument that political representation and political empowerment do not always process simultaneously. Although women have archived greater access legislatures, political governments and other political institutions through democratic reforms, constitutional provisions and genders quotas, these achievements often represent only the first stage of employment. The transition from political inclusion

to genuine political authority is frequently slowed by multiple structural and institutional constraints that continue to influence women political experiences. One of the primary reason for deferred empowerment is the persistence of institutional barriers within political system. Political institutions may provide women opportunities to occupy elected positions while simultaneously limiting their influence over important decisions. Leadership position, policy making committees, and strategic political responsibility often remain concentrated in the hand of established power groups. Consequently, women may be formally represented without processing equal authority to shape agendas or influence governance.

A second factor is continuing influence of patriarchal political culture. Despite legal reforms promoting gender equality, traditional social norms frequently associate political leadership with masculinity and continue to question women's authority in public decision-making. These cultural expectation influence political party, legislative institution, and even public participation, making it more difficult for women to exercise independent leadership after entering political office. Deferred empowerment is also reinforced by party structure and organisational hierarchies. In many political system. Women representatives remain depend on senior party leaders for candidates selection, policies direction, committee assignment, and leadership opportunities. As a result formal political office does not always provide sufficient political autonomy to make independent political discussion and advocate effectively for women's interests.

Finally, inequalities in resources, political experience, institutional support and professional networks further contribute to delay genuine empowerment. Access political office does not automatically provide equal access to financial resources, policy expertise influence political network that are often necessary for effective leadership. These limitations reduce women's ability to translate representation into Substantive political influence. Taken together, these structural, institutional, cultural and organisational barriers demonstrate that the empowerment should be understood as a gradual process rather than an immediate consequences of representation. The concept of Deferred Empowerment therefore explain why formal inclusion frequently precedes genuine political authority. Recognising these interconnected barriers also provides the foundation for identifying the principal components of the proposed theoretical framework, which are discussed in the following section.

3. Components of the Deferred Empowerment Framework

The concept of Deferred Empowerment may be understood through a sequence of interconnected components that explain how women's political representation gradually develop into genuine political empowerment. Rather than viewing empowerment as a immediate outcome of electoral

success or political appointment, the proposed framework conceptualized it is a dynamic process shaded by institutional, social, and political conditions. Each component builds upon the previous one, illustrating that empowerment evolves progressively rather than occurring at a single moment. The first component is Formal Political Representation. Which refers to women's entry in politics through elections, constitutional provisions, gender quotes or political appointment. Representation provide access to legislative and decisions-making institutions mark an important achievements in democratic inclusion. However, representation should be understood as the beginning of the empowerment process rather than its final outcome.

The second component consists of Structural and Institutional Constraints. After entering political institutions women often encounter barriers that limit their ability to exercise independent political authority. This Constraints include patriarchal institutions cultures, unequal organisation practices, restrict access to leadership position, limited political resources, and hierarchal party structures. Such barriers reduce the effectiveness of political participation even when political representation has been archived. The third component is Deferred Empowerment, which represents the transitional stage between formal political inclusion and sustentative political power. During this stage, women possess political positions but continue to face limitations in influencing public policy, exercise leadership, participating equally in political decision-making. The framework therefore recognises that empowerment is frequently delayed rather than immediately realised.

The fourth component is Policy Agency and Institutional Transformation. Deferred empowerment begins to diminish when women gain greater autonomy in political decision-making, develop stronger institutional support, access leadership opportunities and activity challenge unequal gender norms within political institutions. The stage reflects the gradual strengthening of women's political agency and their increasing ability to influence governance beyond symbolic participation. The final component is Genuine Political Empowerment. At this stage women's are able to participate in political institutions as a autonoums decision-makers with meaningful authority over public policy. Leadership processes, and democratic governance. Empowerment is no longer measured simply by numerical representation but by the effective exercise political power, equal participation in decision-making, and the capacity shape of political outcomes. Taken, together, these five interconnected components demonstrate that political empowerment is a continuous process rather than signal achievement. By identifying the traditional stage of Deferred empowerment, the processed framework provides a more comprehensive explanation of how women from political inclusion to genuine political authority. The relationship among these components is illustrated through the conceptual framework in Figure 1.

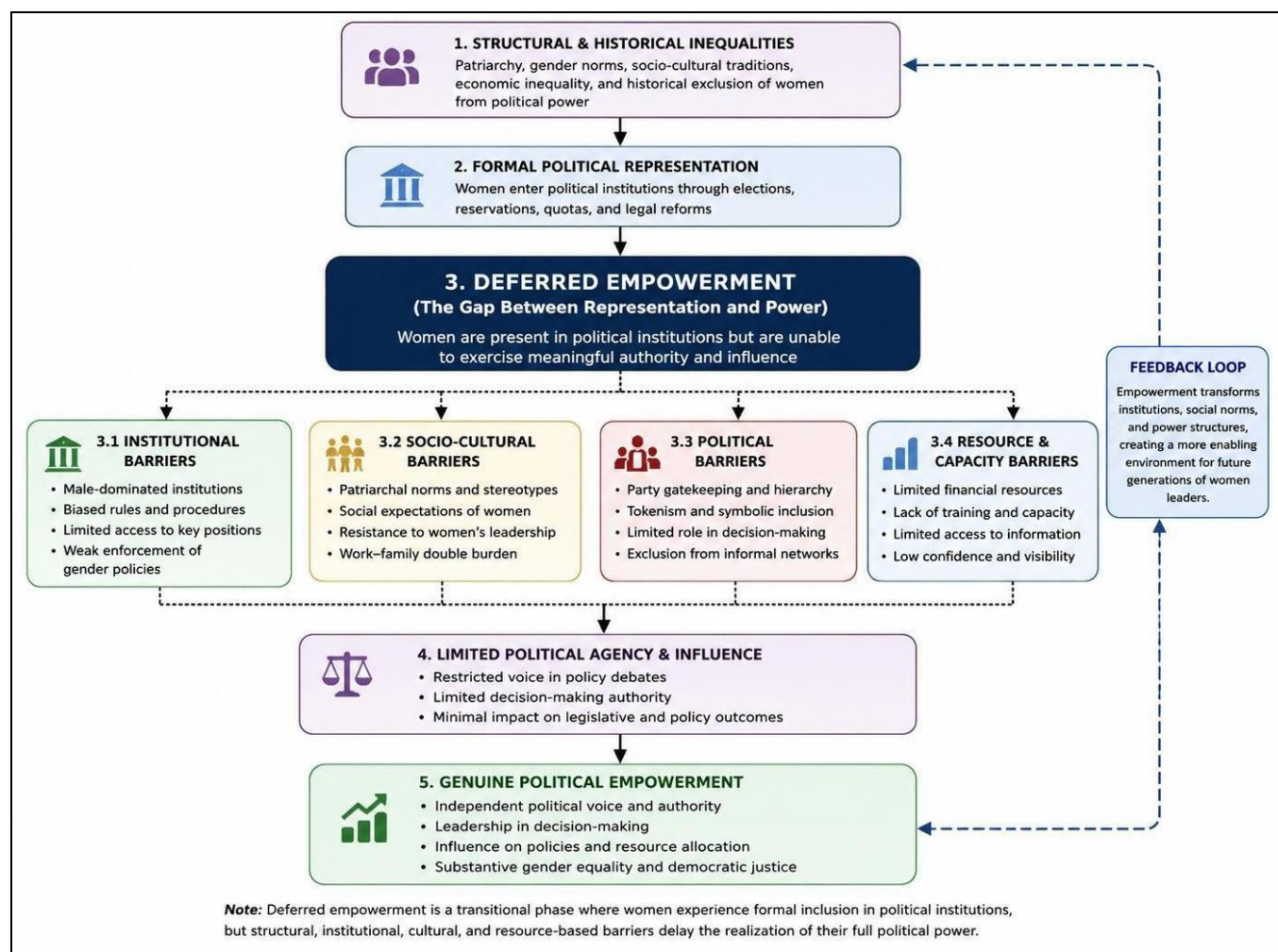


Fig 1: The deferred empowerment framework explaining the gap between representation and genuine political empowerment

4. The Deferred Empowerment Framework: A Conceptual Model

The proposed Deferred Empowerment framework present in figure 1 to illustrate the dynamic relationship between political representation and genuine political empowerment. The framework conceptualized empowerment as a progressive interconnected process rather than an immediate consequences of women's entry into political institutions. It demonstrates that political representation is an essential foundation for empowerment, but it does not automatically guarantee meaningful political authority or influence over decision making.

All illustrated in figure 1, the process begins with political representation, which provides women with access to political institutions through the election, constitutional provisions, reservation and genders quotas. This stage represents as an democratic achievement by increasing women's presence within legislative and governing bodies. However, representation alone should not be interpreted as a evidence of complete political empowerment.

The second age identities the influence of structural and institutional constraints. These include organisational hierarchies, patriarchal political cultures, unequal access to political leadership opportunities, limited institutional support and restrict decision-making authority. Such constraints often the reduce women's ability to transform formal political posi and sustentative political influence.

The central feature of framework is the stage of Deferred Empowerment which represents the conceptual contribution of present study. This stage explain the period during which women possess formal political representation continue to experience limited autonomy, symbolic participation, or restricted policies influence. Rather than viewing empowerment as absent, the framework recognises that it may response postponed until institutional and structural barriers are progressively reduced.

The model further demonstrate that improvements in Political Agency and Institutional Transformation enable women exercise greater interdependence in leadership, policy formulation, and democratic decision-making. As institutional barriers gradually decline and opportunities for autonomous political participation expend, Deferred Empowerment is transformed into Genuine political Empowerment. At this final stage, women are able to influence, shape public policy. And participate as political actors within political institutions.

By presenting empowerment as a gradual political process, the proposed framework offer a more comprehensive explanation women's political achievements than approaches that equate representation with empowerment. Figure 1 therefore serve as the conceptual foundation of the study and provide a systematic model for understanding the progression from political inclusion to genuine political authority.

5. Theoretical Contribution to Feminist Political Science

The proposed concept of Deferred Empowerment contribution to feminist political science by offering a broader theoretical understanding of the relationship between political representation and genuine political authority. While existing feminist scholars has significantly advance debates on gender equality, political participation, representation, and empowerment, the present framework address a conceptual dimension that has received comparatively limited attention. It explain that the transition from formal political inclusion to sustentative political empowerment is neither immediate or automatic, but rather a gradual process influenced by institutional, structural, and socio-political conditions.

Unlike traditional approaches that frequently evaluate women's political process through indication such as electoral participation, legislative representation, or access to political office, the concept of empowerment shift analytical attention towards the quality and effectiveness of women's political authority. It argues that the achievement of political office should be viewed as the beginning of empowerment rather than it's final outcome. Consequently, the framework encourage scholars to distinguished between formal political inclusion and sustentative political empowerment thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of women's political experiences.

The framework also complement rather than replaces, existing theories. It builds upon Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of structural gender inequality, Hanna Pitkin's theory of political representation, Anne Phillips' politics of presence, Naila Kabeer's concept of empowerment, and Judith Butler's understanding of institutional power. By integrating these perspective within a single, analytical mode, the study identifies an intermediate stage that explain why political representation often fail to procedure immediate political authority. In doing, so the framework extend existing scholarship while remaining consistent with its theoretical foundations.

Beyond its theoretical significance concept of Deferred Empowerment has broader implications for future research and public policy. It provides scholars with a new analytical framework examining women's political leadership across different political system encourage policymakers to evaluate policy Empowerment not only in a terms of representation but in also a relation to decision-making authority, institutional inclusion and political agency. Therefore, the proposed framework represents a meaningful contribution to Contemporary feminist political science by expanding the theoretical understanding of how genuine political empowerment develops over time.

Discussion

The preceding section of this study have examine the concept of women's political empowerment through the perspective of feminist political theory, reviewed the existing scholarly literatures, and develop Deferred Empowerment as a conceptual framework for explaining the gap between formal representation and genuine political authority. The discussion presented here interpret these findings within the broader feminist political science and considers their theoretical significance. Rather than viewing political representation as the final objective of gender

equality, the proposed framework suggest that representation should be understood as the beginning of a longer process through which women gradually acquire the authority, autonomy, and institutional capacity necessary to influence political decision making.

The analysis demonstrates that women's increasing participation in political institutions should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of complete political empowerment. Across many democratic system, constitutional reforms, electoral quotas, and affirmative policies have undoubtedly expanded opportunities for women's political representation. However, the continued existence of institutional hierarchies, unequal organisational structures, patriarchal political cultures, and limited access to leadership position often prevents representation from developing into Substantive political influence. These observations support the central argument of the present study that empowerment frequently remains deferred, even after women formally entre political institutions.

From a theoretical perspective, the proposed framework extends existing feminist scholarship rather than challenging it's fundamental assumption. Simon de Beauvoir demonstrate how historical and social structure shape women's subordinate position within society. While Hanna Pitkin distinguished between different dimension of political representation. Anne Phillips further argued that the presence of women within political institutions is essential for democratic legitimacy, and Naila Kabeer conceptualised empowerment as the expansion of people's ability to make meaningful choices. Judith Butler similarly highlighted the ways in which institutional power influence individual agency and political participation. The present study builds upon these contributions by identifying and intermediate stage that has received comparatively limited theoretical attention. Instead of assuming that political representation naturally produced empowerment, the concept of Deferred Empowerment explains the transitional period during which women continue to experience restricted authority despite holding formal political office.

This interpretation also encourages a broader understanding of political empowerment itself. Traditional assessment frequently rely on measurable indicator such as the number of women elected to legislature or appointed to public office. Although these indicators remain important, they cannot fully explain the quality of women's political participation or their actual influence within decision-making institutions. The proposed framework therefore shifts analytical attention from numerical representation towards substantive political authority, institutional autonomy, and effective policy influence. Such a perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of democratic inclusion by recognising that political equality demands not only on access to institutions but also on the capacity to exercise meaningful political power within them.

The framework also has important implications for future feminist political research. It provides scholars with a conceptual tool for examining why similar levels of political representation often produce different outcomes across countries and political systems. Researchers may use the concept of Deferred Empowerment to investigate how institutional design, political parties, leadership structures,

and sociocultural norms shape the relationship between representation and empowerment in different democratic contexts. In addition, policymakers may benefit from evaluating gender equality initiatives not only by increasing women's numerical participation but also by strengthening institutional conditions that enable women to exercise independent political leadership and influence public policy. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that genuine political empowerment should be understood as a gradual and multidimensional process rather than an immediate consequences of political inclusion. By introducing Deferred Empowerment as a theoretical framework the present research expand Contemporary feminist political science and offers a more nuanced explanation of the relationship between representation, political authority, and democratic equality. This perspective not only Contribution to ongoing theoretical debates but also establishes a foundation for future empirical research examining the practical application of the proposed framework across diverse political settings.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine an important question within feminist political science: Why does women's formal political representation not always result in genuine political empowerment? While existing feminist scholarship has made significant contribution to understanding women's political participation, representation, agency, and empowerment, the analysis presented in this study demonstrates that an important Conceptual gap continues to exist between political inclusion and the effective exercise of political authority. Addressing this gap formed the central objective of the present research.

Through a critical examination of feminist political theory and contemporary literature, the study showed that political representation should not be viewed as the final measure of empowerment. Instead, representation provides the institutional opportunity through which empowerment may gradually develop. However, the continued influence of structural inequalities, institutional barriers, organisational hierarchies, and socio-cultural norms frequently delays this process. Consequently, women may occupy political positions while still experiencing limited autonomy, restricted decision making authority, and reduced influence over public policy. These observations suggest that political empowerment is a gradual and multidimensional process rather than an immediate outcome of electoral success or political inclusion.

To explain this overlooked dimensions of women's political experiences, the study introduced deferred empowerment as a conceptual framework within feminist political science. The framework identifies an intermediate stage between formal political representation and genuine political empowerment thereby providing a more comprehensive explanation of how political authority develops over time. Rather than replacing existing theory, theories of political representation, and empowerment studies into a single analytical perspective. In doing so, it offers a new way of understanding why representation alone cannot guarantee substantive political power.

The significance of this study extends beyond theoretical discussion. The concept of Deferred Empowerment

encourage scholars to evaluate women's political progress not only by measuring numerical representation but also by examining institutional authority. Political agency, leadership opportunities, and the capacity to influence governance. Similarly. Policymakers may benefit from recognising that legal reforms and affirmative measures should be accompanied by institutional changes that enable women to exercise meaningful political leadership. A democratic system can therefore be considered genuinely inclusive only when representation is supported by equal opportunities for participation, decision-making, and political influence.

As a conceptual study, this research is subject to certain limitations because it relies primarily on secondary sources and theoretical analysis. This proposed framework has not been empirically tested across different political contexts. Future research may examine the applicability of Deferred Empowerment through comparative case studies, cross national analysis, qualitative interviews, or qualitative investigation, such studies would contribute to refining and validating the framework while expanding its relevance within feminist political science.

In conclusion, this study argues that political empowerment should be understood not as a single political achievement but as a continuous process shaped by institutions, power relations, and democratic practices. By introducing Deferred Empowerment as a new theoretical framework, the research contributes to contemporary feminist political science and offers a broader perspective for analysing the relationship between political representation, political authority, and genuine women's empowerment.

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