




## Chapter Ten

# Enhancing Women's Participation in Democratic Governance in Sierra Leone

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### Introduction

Women's participation in democratic governance has become increasingly prominent in African politics for several decades. Since the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, the issue of female political participation has garnered momentum, as many states have taken steps to institute mechanisms to address their under-representation, especially in democratic governance. The implementation of these instruments has led to more significant strides in terms of increasing women's descriptive and substantive political representation in some countries (Bauer, 2012:370), while in others, the gap between women and men in politics has widened. This has highlighted the argument on whether the creation and adoption of these mechanisms are solely for procedural benefits or with an intent to translate to substantive results. However, since liberal democracy stresses equal participation of men and women in the political process to achieve substantive results, safeguarding women's empowerment and gender equality is paramount.

Sierra Leonean women are renowned for their political involvement before and after independence. Regrettably, the varied political history of *countercoups*, coups, and one-party authoritarianism after independence ended their political



activism (Castillejo, 2009:1-32). This was short-lived, as women, and women's groups soon led prominent campaigns and discussions, which culminated in the end of the civil war. Subsequently, the transition to peace in 2002 (Abdullah, 2010:62). Despite the above, women remain under-represented in democratic governance as men mostly dominate the political space. As a result, female representation and access to political leadership positions across local governments, national parliaments, and executive institutions of power remain low (UN Women, 2024). Barriers such as systemic patriarchal practices and cultural norms continue to confine Sierra Leonean women and their activities within their homes, thus affording them little or no room to participate in politics (Kellow, 2010).

Since the essence of liberal democracy requires equal representation, participation and inclusion of all groups in society (Dahl, 2004), women thus have the right to be involved in decision-making processes which affect their lives. Their inclusion and equal representation in political processes remains paramount for the enhancement on the consolidation of democracy (Kim, 2019:594). Also, since the quality of democracy is hinged not only on how accountable political institutions are but also on the extent to which men and women participate in these institutions, gender becomes an important necessary aspect, and women's political exclusion will result in an incomplete and biased form of democracy (Moghadam, 2011).

Accordingly, a UN Women report (2025) UN Women report (2025) indicates that women's equal participation and leadership in political and public life is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Number five of the SDGs requires all states to implement policies to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls. Indicator 5.5 specifically calls on states to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all political, economic, and public decision-making levels. However, after almost three decades of resisting calls from women's groups and promoters of gender equality for the adoption of female quotas to increase women's political representation in democratic governance, Sierra Leonean

president Julius Bio, on 19 January 2022 (a few months before the country's general elections) signed into law the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act (Thomas, 2023).

The 2022 GEWE Act highlights the importance of gender mainstreaming and women's participation in decision-making roles across all areas of governance. It has been regarded as an important step by the government to promote the representation of women in democratic governance. This is because it is widely believed that effecting a 30% constitutionally mandated gender quota system is one of the most effective ways to achieve more female representation in legislatures and close the wide gap that exists numerically between men and women in the public sphere. Also, the implementation of the quota system has resulted in an increase in female representation in politics in many countries, which is crucial for achieving broader gender equality (Nayar, 2021).

In addition, the concept of democratic governance refers to institution reform. By institutions, Guell (2002) refers to the ground rules that govern the relationship between men and women since they outline the restrictions and opportunities that both groups encounter through their relationships with others in different contexts. He adds that these institutions could be either formal (organisations and laws) or informal (customs), affecting people's interactions. Measures should be taken to address inequality between men and women. In this regard, the chapter investigates the state of women's participation in democratic governance in Sierra Leone. It further investigates whether the 2022 GEWE Act has implications for the growth of women in the field of democratic governance and what it pertains to future elections in the country. The chapter seeks to contribute to further research on addressing women's political participation in democratic governance in Sierra Leone by using the 2022 GEWE Act as a framework of analysis.

The article adopted a qualitative case chapter approach, allowing the researcher to explore in-depth from different angles. This qualitative approach explored how groups or

individuals contribute to a human or social problem (Creswell, 2017). The approach used an explanatory research design, which allowed for an increased understanding of the term 'democratic governance' and how it has been enhanced in Sierra Leone through the analysis of the 2022 GEWE Act to promote women's political participation. Secondary sources were used, with relevant literature sourced from journal articles, textbooks, official gazettes, documents, and news chapters.

The chapter is divided into five sections: following this introduction, the second section presents a conceptual understanding of emerging literature on the term 'democratic governance' by focusing on its steps, structure, and processes. The third section briefly discusses barriers to women's involvement in African politics. The fourth outlines possible implications for the 2022 GEWE Act on democratic governance in the country. Section five wraps up the discussion and revisits the chapter's main objective.

## **Democratic Governance: An Understanding**

Democratic governance is not a new concept, as many scholars have different interpretations of its origin, nature, and importance for women's political participation. For example, democratic governance is believed to have originated from the word 'democracy', as it facilitates civil liberties, governance, institutional accountability and individual freedoms and human rights for all citizens in pluralistic societies (Fukuyama, 2014:92; Dahl, 2004). As a more inclusive and broader concept, democratic governance stresses the need for citizens' involvement in institutions of governance to exercise their legal rights by drafting and implementing policies for their benefit. Gumede (2021) stresses the importance of these decisions following a democratic process with equal participation of men and women.

Grugel and Pipel (2007:3) identify the key pillars of democratic governance. These include the rule of law, constitutionalism, the role of political institutions in engaging citizens, professionalisation of the civil service, promoting

public transparency, accountability, and citizen's participation in governmental affairs, and enhancing the legitimacy of credible elections (Kim et al., 2005:646-654). Thus, its sustenance relies upon the enhancement of the living standards of all citizens in society. In situations where another group has minimal or no voice in drafting government policies (Obiany, 2012:179), democratic governance will face challenges.

The nature of an electoral system could positively or negatively affect democratic governance. Although electoral systems and elections are essential components for democratic governance, they are not sufficient requirements for democratic governance, as the choice of an electoral system is shaped by political history and context. Nonetheless, electoral system reform is necessary for ensuring legitimacy, accountability and representation (Du Pisani, 2007:8). This presents an essential space for the inclusion of women in politics, as their needs might be considered during selecting the electoral system. Reilly (2015:225-236) contends that compared to the first past the post (FPTP) system for example, the proportional representation (PR) system enhances women's political participation, as it fairly translates votes into seats, promotes minorities' access to representation, improves gender representation and presents a more socially diverse and inclusive list of candidates. The FPTP, however, may exclude minority parties, encourage sectarian parties and possibly exclude women (Du Pisani, 2007:8).

Narayan (2005) links democratic governance to empowerment. She describes empowerment as "the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives". In this regard, the above terms concern citizens' ability to exercise their rights over state power in different dimensions. Since analysts of democratic governance evaluate the continued involvement of men and women in decision-making structures and their access to public institutions through accountability, organisation and inclusion, their empowerment is also essential as it falls within this category (Munck, 2005).

Democratic governance has been linked to institutions and good governance. Isma'ila and Madu (2016) contend that democratic governance encompasses a set of processes whereby institutions such as the executive, national assembly, political parties, judiciary, community and family exist, and all citizens have the right to exercise their constitutional and legal rights to determine policies best suited to address their needs (Malena, 2009). Since gender inequality is embedded in the above institutions (Brody, 2009:10), it is therefore imperative to monitor them so that they can become more responsive to women's socioeconomic and political needs (Mensah-Kutin, 2010). Therefore, a sound democratic governance needs an autonomous and strong legislature which will not only carry out its legal duties but also implement accountability amongst appointed and elected public officials (Zafarullah, 1999:184). For this reason, governance principles of transparency, accountability, responsiveness, inclusiveness and leadership must be enhanced (Goetz, 2007). However, democracy and good governance should not be combined, as democracies alone are not enough to guarantee the interests of women. This can only be possible when democratic states govern competently and enforce the rule of law. In other words, laws guaranteeing women's rights must not only exist but be enforced.

Women's civil and political rights are closely linked to democratic governance. Focusing on emerging literature on women's rights, Jamal (2010) states that women's rights are affected by the political culture of a nation, the type of political right that they possess, the effective implementation of the rule of law and opportunities provided for by the political structure of a state. She further argues that democracy is not achieved without including women in politics and amplifying women's voices in legislation, political institutions, and processes. As Madeline Albright (2010) puts it, 'success without democracy is improbable; democracy without women is impossible'. Apart from the fact that democracy opens the civic space for women and creates more opportunities for them to access political power (Högström, 2015), it also offers them a platform to promote their interests through mobilisation, advocacy and

elections (Beer, 2009). The absence of such spaces affects women negatively, as it makes them more vulnerable to pre-existing patriarchal structures (Jamal, 2010). The inclusion of a gender element is paramount for ensuring women's civil and political rights and, thus, the achievement of democratic governance. The section below briefly discusses barriers against women's political participation in Africa.

## **Barriers Against Women's Political Participation in Africa**

Female exclusion from governance structures such as ministerial positions, political parties' structures, judiciary, parliaments, and even within local governance has been prevalent in Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, female parliamentary representation stood at 12% in 2000, 19% in 2010, 25% in 2020 and 27% at the beginning of 2024 (UN Women, 2024). Although the above figures showed a minimal increase in women's political representation, they indicate the slow progress towards achieving the SDGs by 2030 in the region. Even though some African countries have made greater strides in guaranteeing women's political participation in democratic governance with the adoption and implementation of several international, regional and national gender frameworks, others have made minimal or no efforts (despite their adoption of these same frameworks). As a result, women continue to face exclusion because of socio-economic and political challenges, as explained below.

### **Social Factors**

Fundamental to the constraints that women face is an entrenched patriarchal system which operates at all levels of society, conferring prestige and privilege on men at the expense of women. Patriarchal values tend to sustain oppression through legitimisation obtained via religious dogma, traditional values, and even secular value systems, which often legitimise male domination and gender injustice (International IDEA, 2021:21; Badri & Tripp, 2017). These attitudes and behaviours are

transferred from the private realm and have become embedded into socio-economic and political institutions (Goetz, 2007), thus offering women limited influence when they are accepted into such institutions. Foulds (2014) contends that when women assume more public roles, they become visible in influential positions, and this could probably result in their increased participation in the political process. The restraint of women to household jobs gives them little time to be nurtured for public offices, as men are prepared for roles outside the homes (Morojole, 2011). They become cautious when entering politics or public roles which may affect their marriage or home.

Education provides the required knowledge and talent needed to participate in politics and potential candidates require a minimum awareness of the political system, skills in writing and reading and general knowledge of issues of importance to the public (Hillygus, 2005:27). However, the lack of quality education and low literacy levels affect women's active political participation as they become intimidated and less confident when they need to challenge their male counterparts especially during party nomination processes (Ofusori, 2021). In addition, there is an argument that women were brought up to regard politics as 'foreign' and that their lives and activities were designed to direct them away from power activities. This affords them little time as they will need to juggle between their career and family responsibilities, thus offering them limited time to advance their careers (Kabeer, 2015). Rogers (2011:57) adds that Sierra Leonean women are affected by religious practices. She states that while Christianity (Protestant) has encouraged women's political participation, some Islamists still do not allow women to contest for leadership positions. Their excuse is that women's participation will make them arrogant, and they will subsequently disrespect the male folks. She further argues that part of this belief stems from the varying interpretations (or even misinterpretation) of religion (Rogers, 2011:57).

### **Economic factors**

Income inequality based on gender is another factor that promotes female political exclusion. The median monthly

salary in sub-Saharan Africa for men is twice as much as that of women, and a chapter on the worth of female entrepreneurship in Africa indicated that the incomes of female entrepreneurs are, on average, only two-thirds that of male entrepreneurs (Dube, 2023). Finance is important in politics, as it becomes challenging to fund a campaign or conduct any other political affairs without money (Sivi-Njonjo, 2016). Because of the lack of finance, female political party aspirants might find it challenging to compete for political positions as they are likely to lose out to the highest bidders, who are likely to be men (Opuko et al., 2018). Also, as caregivers and contributors to domestic work, women are left with little income to compete for party positions, as they are not usually supported by the state (Bryson, 2003). Although they might receive support from political parties and the public, these typically happen after securing a nomination (Sidhu & Meena, 2007:11).

### **Political Factors**

The ratification, adoption and signing of international and regional frameworks; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (BFA) the 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) (also known as the Maputo Protocol and appears to be the most progressive African legal instrument providing a comprehensive set of human rights for women), have been regarded as a point of departure for subsequent national frameworks for many African states. However, the inability of many states either to fully enforce them or to draft appropriate policies to address gender concerns has resulted in the exclusion of women in the political processes. Politics influences policymaking process, and the absence of a significant number of women in influential positions would deny them a fair representation (Milligan, 2014).

The transition to democracy presented many countries emerging from conflict in the 1990s an opportunity to rewrite their legal systems and constitutions to include the provisions of normative frameworks stressing gender equality (Berry et

al., 2021). Although many states utilised this space to design constitutional frameworks and to institute electoral systems which have subsequently fostered the adoption of temporary special measures (TSMs) in the form of affirmative action and quotas to promote female political participation, challenges persist. Some electoral laws are gender-insensitive, while electoral systems promote the under-representation of women. For example, in some African countries (Central Africa Republic, Uganda), the FPTP system seldom substantially increases women's representation. The tendency in countries using the FPTP system is for parties to field candidates in constituencies that they think are most likely to win. In this case, female candidates are often disregarded as safe bets (International IDEA, 2021: 53).

The equality of all voices and gender equality is embedded in freedom of expression. However, many studies have highlighted that women's voices have been limited as they make up less than one-quarter of voices and views heard in the media. Although significant improvements in women's media representation exist (Nyamweda, 2023), female politicians continue to receive less media attention than their male counterparts, as they are regarded as 'trespassers' in the traditionally 'masculine' political world (Verge & Pastor, 2018). In most West African countries, for example, male dominance is prevalent in radio as female programming is usually consigned narrowly to interpretation of gender issues such as childcare, domestic responsibilities or marriage. When on air, women are perceived through a traditional model in the context of their relationship with their children or husbands and not as individuals with a wide variety of various needs and interests (Fortune et al., 2011). This 'silent censorship' has further entrenched women's exclusion from politics as their voices are notably missing from electoral news coverage (International IDEA, 2021:112), which is an essential aspect in securing votes.

In many African countries, politics is tainted by intimidation, persecution, torture and violence, and violence against women seeking political office is very common, especially in politically unstable regions (True et al., 2012:2).

While men and women are victims of this, political violence offers specific challenges to women's political participation and engagements (International IDEA, 2021:23). A 2015 Afrobarometer Survey highlights that women feel 'a sense of vulnerability of political intimidation and violence' (International IDEA, 2021:23). The effects of war continue for years after the fighting ends. While entire communities suffer the impact of armed conflict, women and girls are often the first to lose their rights to education, political participation and livelihoods, amongst other rights being bluntly violated (International IDEA, 2021:23; True et al., 2012:2).

It is widely believed that the primary point of women's entry into politics is through political parties (International IDEA, 2021). However, male dominance in party politics has been named one of the critical constraints for women's membership and participation, especially as candidates. While some political parties have TSM for women's representation in parliament and local government, they do not necessarily apply these same quotas to internal party structures (International IDEA, 2021:73). Although candidates can still compete as independents, it is thus demanding to be elected without the patronage of a political party, especially at a national election. Thus, women seeking entry into electoral politics generally join political parties (Ballington, 2011). Although many women actively participate at the grassroots level in mobilising support and campaigning for their parties, few occupy senior decision-making positions within the parties (Ara, 2019:13). When parties fail to comply with national commitments to ensure that women assume leadership posts within the party, this raises questions about their commitment to advancing gender equality more broadly.

Women's presence in democratic institutions of governance allows for the drafting of broader and inclusive strategies as they interact with men within these institutions. Having discussed possible obstacles faced by women in politics, the section below examines efforts by the Sierra Leonean government (through the adoption of the 2022 GEWE Act) to increase women's participation in democratic governance.

## **Promoting Women's Participation in Democratic Governance in Sierra Leone**

The inclusion of women in democratic governance supports the significance of addressing gender inequality in Sierra Leone and enhancing the provision of SDG 5. Women constitute about 52% of the country's population but account for about 20% of elected positions. Their visibility, voice, representation and participation in appointment and elected positions remain low compared to men (International IDEA, 2024). Democratic governance has highlighted the importance of all citizens' (including women) involvement in politics and decision-making structures. Despite adopting several global, regional and domestic (the three Gender Acts) frameworks by the Sierra Leonean government, female representation in democratic governance is still minimal.

The attainment of democratic governance has been linked to including a gender component in good governance, electoral system, empowerment, local and public institutions, and ensuring civil and political rights. Therefore, including a gender dimension to address structural inequalities which limit women's political participation and involvement in decision-making structures is essential. This is the reason why the signing of the 2022 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act by President Julius Maada Bio in January 2023 (a few months before the 2023 general elections) was regarded by many gender equality promoters as a significant step towards increasing female representation in democratic governance as well as achieving SDG 5. The focus of this chapter has therefore been to investigate whether the 2022 Gender Act has implications for women's democratic governance and what it pertains to future elections in the country, as explained below.

### **The 2022 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act**

Increasingly, "gender quotas have arguably been the most drastic and highly contentious reform in the field of gender equality in the last 50 to 60 years" (Zetterberg, 2009:715). As an important instrument to fast-track female political

representation emanating from the growing impatience on the slow pace of change in women's political power (Dahlerup, 2013), they stipulate a specific percentage of women to be included in positions of leadership (Tappe Ortiz & Kobrich, 2022). Therefore, the passing of the 2022 Gender Act can be alluded to as one of the most concrete mechanisms designed by the Sierra Leonean government to advance women's socio-economic and political rights by increasing their representation. Its passing also raises a question on whether its implementation will have more significant implications for addressing gender inequality between men and women and what it pertains to democratic governance and future elections in the country.

Since the equal representation of men and women is one of the key pillars of democracy, female inclusion in decision-making structures is thus paramount. Section 2 of the 2022 Gender Act, for example, focuses on Public Elections and Appointment into Office and reaffirms the provision of Section 58.2 of the Public Elections Act of 2022, which in turn requires that for every three candidates nominated for electoral positions, one must be a woman. (Parliament of Sierra Leone, 2022). This provision may be regarded as insignificant because of women's high involvement as participants in the political process. Still, it is however essential, as their exclusion stems from their inability to become nominated within party structures because of socio-economic challenges, as stated above. Apart from being amongst the key institutions for inclusive participation and accountable representation, people become involved in public life through political parties and support candidates and parties that reflect their views and interests (International IDEA, 2024).

Although there exist debates on the importance of political parties within a democracy, it does not negate the fact that they have been identified as important instruments in recruiting, nominating and voting of candidates for public office (Catón, 2007). They are key structures primarily responsible for the under-representation of women, given their role as the primary 'gatekeepers' to elective positions of power and decision-making at all levels in most countries (International IDEA, 2024). This is an important aspect for Sierra Leonean women

because, for several decades, they have continuously suffered from entrenched patriarchal structures and discrimination within political parties. Although some parties seemingly appear to ‘support’ female inclusion, internal discriminatory attitudes are often ignored. Even when given seats within their respective political parties, many of these seats are regarded as ‘unwinnable’ (Castillejo, 2009:7), as women find it difficult to compete on an equal playing field with their male counterparts.

As a result, being nominated as party representatives for electoral posts seems like a mammoth hurdle that they cannot overcome. For example, the presentation of two female candidates by the Sierra Leone Political Party (SLPP) (as vice president) and the Alliance Democratic Party (ADP) (for president) for the 2012 and 2023 elections, respectively, could be regarded as small gains for female political representation in the country. Although both parties lost the elections, the SLPP garnered 37% of the vote compared to the ADP, which only received 0.16% of the votes (AYV News, 2023a; DeVries, 2012). Importantly, out of the 13 presidential aspirants for the 2023 elections, only one was a female candidate, despite the country adopting the 2022 GEWE Act a few months before the elections. A possible explanation for this outcome might be the lack of adequate time to fully implement the Act’s provisions by all political parties.

Currently, the Sierra Leonean parliament consists of 149 members, of which 135 are directly elected from across 16 districts, while 14 are paramount chiefs appointed from the 14 rural districts (Parliament of Sierra Leone, 2025). As a governance component, female entry to parliament is important since they can influence and design policies to attend to issues often left unaddressed. Their political parties’ representation, therefore, translates to parliament. For several years, female parliamentary representation has been downward since the country’s transition to multipartyism in 2002. Their parliamentary representation during the four electoral cycles (2002, 2007, 2012 and 2018) failed to reach the 30% minimum provision of global and regional gender frameworks. In the 2002 elections, for instance (under the PR electoral system),

156 women contested for the 80 parliamentary seats, but only 18 (including two paramount chiefs) were elected. Despite there being a female deputy speaker, only six women (out of 23) were elected chairpersons of committees (Lahai, 2015:132-148). In addition, with the reintroduction of the FPTP electoral system, 64 women contested the 2007 elections, and only 16 (out of 112 seats) (13.5%) were successful. Only five women were committee chairs and no female paramount chief (Abdullah, 2010). Also, female contestation for the 2012 elections stood at 65, with only 15 (12%) elected. Data from the 2018 elections showed that women garnered only 18 (12%) out of 132 available seats (Kallon, 2023). Although the implementation of the Act witnessed a surge in female parliamentary representation during the 2023 elections, with them winning 41 (30.4%) out of the 135 seats, only one woman was indirectly elected as paramount chief (IPU, 2023). Despite recent data indicating the progress made when compared to previous elections, it is evident that much still needs to be performed to achieve more female parliamentary representation.

Female presence in constituencies is a determinant of favourable conditions for their growth as politicians within a party. Even when women contest for elections as independent or political party candidates, they cannot compete equally with men because of the existence of systemic patriarchal challenges. The 2022 GEWE Act could offer women a solid guarantee for parliamentary representation whereby they could influence policies and offer them an opportunity to participate in discussions where pertinent programmes are discussed on one hand and present them with a platform where they could raise issues deemed unimportant by others.

Furthermore, Section three of the 2022 GEWE Act requires that under due consideration from the president, women should be appointed to occupy at least 30% of cabinet positions and other government positions. For appointments to public office made by persons other than the president, at least 30% should be women (Parliament of Sierra Leone, 2022). This is important, as female cabinet representation in the country has been minimal since 2002. For instance, from the 21 ministerial

positions, only three women were appointed ministers in 2007 and by May 2010, there was only one remaining and three deputies (Abdullah, 2010). Even when appointed, women are usually given ministerial positions with less important portfolios such as Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Marine Resources and Fisheries, Foreign Affairs or Social Welfare, Gender and Children Affairs or act as deputies to men (Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, 2014). However, under Bio's government, there has been a modest improvement of 41% with the appointment of eight ministers (out of 26 ministers) and six deputy ministers (out of 21 ministers) as against three and five ministers (including deputies) under former presidents Tejan Kabbah and Bai Koroma respectively (Kanu, 2011). Apart from women occupying portfolios with less significance, as stated above, some women now occupy important ministries such as Higher and Technical Education, posts in the Vice President's Office and act as Deputy Minister of Finance (AYN News, 2023b).

Although the presence of more women in Maada's cabinet is an excellent start for their political participation, the language used in the 2022 GEWE Act could be problematic, as it gives the president sufficient powers to make appointments solely at his discretion. President Maada has indicated his willingness to support gender equity by signing the Act. However, there is no guarantee that the gender quota will be consistently implemented by his successor with such a vague provision. This opens the avenue for manipulating the Act, since it does not require actual commitment from the president.

Whether legislated, reserved seats, or party quotas, they have significantly reduced gender gaps in politics and decision-making in most states. Rwanda, for example, stands as a beacon of hope for female political representation, with more than two-thirds of women holding legislative seats and 50% for legislative seats cabinet positions and especially in Sierra Leone (UN Women, 2024). Also, Senegal has 46% of women holding parliamentary seats, while South Africa has over 44% of women's parliamentary representation (UN Women, 2024). This further echoes the belief that the most apparent benefit of quotas is to improve descriptive representation, which is

essential for achieving broader gender equality. In other words, if more women run for office, then even more will test the limits of what is possible for political representation or be encouraged to run for office because of the role model effect in which they see people like themselves winning seats (Nayar, 2021).

Even though many scholars believe that the adoption of quotas has helped to fast-track female representation in legislatures, others regard it as a numbers game which has not only succeeded in introducing more women into parliaments but also those who are unqualified (Gouws, 2011:70–89). Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2005:27), for instance, affirm that quotas can be used to consolidate female parliamentary representation after a significant number of women have already been voted into parliament after a long while. For instance, it took 60 years for most Scandinavian countries to reach the 20% mark for female representation. However, there exist perceptions that quotas undermine democracy, as they are unfairly advantageous to one group (women) over the other (men). Quotas are believed to manipulate the choices of voters as they may be tailored to fit specific roles or act as a detriment to women by implying that they cannot be elected on their own, as they will need government or political parties' intervention to succeed in politics (Nayar, 2021). Although the above assertions may be acceptable, they do not negate the fact that women need quotas as a point of departure for their inclusion in democratic governance. Since democracy requires the equal participation and representation of all groups within a political system, the only way to increase female political representation (especially young women) is by implementing some form of affirmative action. For example, the historic election of two young Sierra Leonean women, Sia Mahawa Tommy and Alice Kornya Sandy (aged 27 and 28), as parliamentarians from the Kono and Kenema districts (Parker, 2023) respectively, indicates the importance of quotas, as they have come to represent hopes and aspirations for many young women in the country.

Tappe Ortiz and Kobrich (2022) contend that although quotas have increased female political representation, it has not changed the general rules of politics, which could create

avenues for women to enter leadership positions at all levels. This is important, as the existence of gender stereotypes and cultural norms affecting female political participation have continually impeded female political growth. For this reason, female involvement during the drafting and implementation of policies affecting them is important and will lead to substantive results. Therefore, the 2022 GEWE Act is a step in the right direction for the inclusion of women in democratic governance and will further increase their representation in future elections.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter examined the state of female representation in democratic governance in Sierra Leone. Enhancing female political participation in democratic governance has been a growing phenomenon in Sierra Leone for many decades. Promoters of gender equality have consistently reiterated the importance of the inclusion of women in all aspects of democratic governance and the need to address systemic challenges that they face in politics. Since democracy involves equal participation of all groups in society (including women), excluding one group of the population will be detrimental to its consolidation.

During four electoral cycles (2002–2018), Sierra Leonean women’s participation in democratic governance has been minimal despite the existence of global and regional gender frameworks, which required the implementation of at least a 30% quota to increase their representation. Many political actors have regarded the 2022 GEWE Act as a departure point for enhancing women’s political participation by offering them avenues to influence policies to address issues prohibiting them from fully participating in politics.

The chapter found that as a legislated quota, the 2022 GEWE Act is a step in the right direction, as it not only attains the provision of SDG 5 but increases women in positions of accountability by 2030. With the systemic challenges that women face in politics, some form of affirmation is needed. Therefore, the effectiveness of the 2022 GEWE Act is hinged

on the willingness of all political stakeholders to ensure its implementation and the strengthening of other existing gender frameworks to promote women's participation in democratic governance. Since political parties are important for women, as they are widely regarded as an entry point for them in politics, their processes should be transparent and inclusive. Also, addressing the root causes of female political participation is paramount to ensuring their participation in democratic governance.

Beyond guaranteeing quotas, it is imperative to constantly evaluate the 2022 GEWE Act, which will not only strengthen its status but will also assist in highlighting women's political issues. In other words, enforcing gender frameworks and policies is not enough to facilitate female democracy, but assessing their relevance is also important. The implementation of quotas has become increasingly popular, and although its progress may be slow, it is an important means of increasing female political representation. More encouraging is the general receptiveness towards adopting the Act, as this will translate to the high involvement of women in future electoral processes in the country.

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