

Social, Economic, and Political Challenges of Women in Local Political Leadership: A Convergent Mixed-Methods Study in Santo Tomas, Davao del Norte, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Women's participation in local political leadership remains structurally constrained by interlocking social, economic, and political barriers that are inadequately documented in the Philippine governance literature, particularly at the barangay and municipal levels. This study investigated the lived experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of female elected officials in the Municipality of Santo Tomas, Davao del Norte, using a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were drawn from the complete demographic registry of 26 female elected officials in the municipality, while qualitative data were generated through key informant interviews (KIIs) with eight purposively selected women leaders — one Municipal Councilor, two *punong barangays*, and five *barangay kagawads*. Demographic analysis revealed that the majority of female officials are married (65.4%), middle-aged to older (70.8% aged ≥ 42 years), and concentrated in barangay-level positions (84.6% Barangay Councilors). Thematic analysis of interview data identified three challenge domains — social, economic, and political — and their corresponding coping orientations. Social themes converged on the negotiation of dual identity as wife-and-leader, the navigation of gender stereotypes in traditionally male-dominated domains such as peace and order, and the mobilization of maternal resilience as a leadership resource. Economic themes surfaced persistent financial barriers to entry and advancement, limited educational credentials among participants, and the valorization of experiential competence over formal qualification. Political themes documented persistent gender skepticism in electoral contexts, the transformation of political doubt into motivational fuel, and the emergence of collectively oriented governance values. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings revealed that the dominance of married, older women in formal leadership positions reflects the operation of social maturity norms that simultaneously confer political legitimacy and impose domestic burden. The study concludes that gender-responsive governance frameworks — encompassing targeted financial support, leadership mentorship, and work-family policy reform — are prerequisites for deepening women's substantive participation in Philippine local governance.

Keywords: *women in local governance, gender mainstreaming, barangay leadership, gender-responsive governance, Philippines.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The underrepresentation of women in political leadership is one of the most persistent structural inequalities in governance systems worldwide. Despite significant progress over recent decades — the global share of women parliamentarians has more than doubled since 1995 — women remain substantially underrepresented at all levels of formal political power, and progress toward the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality is widely assessed as critically off-track for the 2030 deadline (UN Women, 2023). At the local governance level, where political decisions most directly shape the lived

conditions of communities, women's participation is both particularly consequential and particularly constrained — a paradox that the governance literature has noted but not fully resolved.

In the Philippine context, local governance occupies a uniquely important position in the country's political architecture. The barangay system — the most granular unit of political administration — directly governs the daily lives of millions of Filipinos, and barangay officials, including *punong barangays* and *kagawads*, exercise substantial discretion over community-level resource allocation, dispute resolution, and social service delivery. Women's effective participation in this tier of governance is therefore

not a peripheral policy concern but a foundational determinant of how social development, public safety, and community welfare are managed at the grassroots. Cabrera (1984) established that barangay governance is where the gap between formal representation and substantive political agency is most starkly visible for women: their numbers at this level may be improving, but the conditions under which they exercise authority remain shaped by gender norms and structural disadvantages that quantitative headcounts do not capture.

The global literature on women in political leadership consistently identifies three intersecting domains of constraint. Social constraints encompass the normative expectations about gender roles, domestic responsibilities, and appropriate conduct for women in public life — Moser's (1997) concept of the triple burden of women's reproductive, productive, and community management responsibilities being among the most analytically durable frameworks for understanding these pressures. Economic constraints operate through the financial barriers to political candidacy, the gender pay gap that limits women's campaign resources, and the educational disadvantages that shape political networks and credibility. Political constraints include discriminatory institutional cultures, the absence of mentorship pathways for women within political organizations, and the gender stereotypes that shape voter and party perceptions of women's leadership capabilities (Fox & Lawless, 2007; Keohane, 2020). Studies from Pakistan (Naz, Waheed, & Fatima, 2023), Indonesia (Agustina, Sukmana, & Setiawati, 2023), and the Philippines (Paraggua, 2022) confirm that these constraint domains are operative across diverse institutional and cultural environments, though their specific configuration varies with local governance context.

The literature on women's leadership is organized around a consistent empirical finding: women who access formal leadership positions face a compound of challenges that their male counterparts do not, arising from the intersection of gender norms, institutional culture, and structural resource disadvantage. Eagly (2007) characterizes this as the 'female leadership advantage and disadvantage paradox': women in leadership are assessed as bringing distinctive

collaborative and communally oriented strengths, yet simultaneously face persistent resistance arising from the perceived incongruity between the assertive qualities associated with effective leadership and the communal qualities socially expected of women. This incongruity is particularly acute in domains conventionally associated with masculine authority — security, law enforcement, and administrative command — where women's credibility is routinely questioned irrespective of their demonstrated competence.

Moreover, Naz, Waheed, and Fatima's (2023) analysis of gender mainstreaming in Pakistani governance, and Stanić's (2023) European study linking gender balance to improved fiscal transparency, together suggest that the governance quality benefits of women's effective participation are not confined to developing country contexts but represent a systemic finding with implications for the design of local governance institutions globally. In the Philippines, the Magna Carta of Women (Republic Act 9710) provides the legislative mandate for gender mainstreaming across government functions, requiring that gender and development (GAD) plans and budgets address the substantive equality concerns that formal representation alone cannot resolve. However, the translation of this mandate into practice at the barangay and municipal level is uneven, and the specific gaps between the formal commitments of the Magna Carta framework and the lived experience of women in local governance remain inadequately documented.

Focusing on governance, where barangay leadership encompasses responsibility for peace and order, community dispute resolution, and social welfare delivery, this credibility deficit is directly consequential for women's ability to exercise substantive rather than merely nominal authority. Paraggua (2022) documented through phenomenological inquiry how Filipino women leaders in male-dominated environments develop specific adaptive strategies — demonstrating exceptional efficiency, building consensus through inclusive communication, and performing the 'double shift' of authority at work and submission at home — to manage the incongruity between their gender position and their governance role. The emotional and cognitive labor required to sustain this adaptation constitutes what Moser (1997) characterized as

the triple burden: the demand that women simultaneously discharge productive, reproductive, and community management functions without institutional support calibrated to the compound nature of that demand.

Despite growing international attention to gender-responsive governance frameworks and their documented effectiveness in improving women's substantive participation — Stanić (2023) links gender balance in local leadership to improved budget transparency, while Van Voorhis (2022) identifies gender-responsive institutional design as essential for equitable outcomes — the lived experience of women navigating these frameworks at the Philippine municipal and barangay level is inadequately documented. Most existing research either examines representation at national and regional levels or focuses on specific aspects of women's political participation in isolation from the broader constraint landscape. What is missing is a study that simultaneously captures the demographic profile of women in local governance, the thematic texture of their experienced challenges across social, economic, and political domains, and the coping strategies through which they sustain their participation despite those challenges.

This study addresses this gap through a convergent mixed-methods investigation of female elected officials in the Municipality of Santo Tomas, Davao del Norte. It pursues three specific objectives: first, to characterize the demographic distribution of women across local leadership positions in the municipality; second, to identify the social, economic, and political challenges confronting women in these roles and to describe the coping strategies through which they navigate these challenges; and third, to integrate quantitative demographic patterns and qualitative experiential evidence to generate a more complete account of the conditions under which women participate in local governance in the Philippine regional context.

II. METHOD

A. Study Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in the Municipality of Santo Tomas, Davao del Norte, Philippines. Santo Tomas was selected because of the presence of identifiable female elected officials across

multiple governance tiers, the researchers' institutional access, and the municipality's representativeness of rural Philippine governance contexts in which women's leadership challenges have not been previously systematically studied.

For the quantitative strand, the complete roster of 26 female elected officials in Santo Tomas — comprising one Municipal Councilor, three Punong Barangays, and 22 Barangay Kagawads — was obtained from the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) municipal office. This complete enumeration rather than sampling ensured that the demographic profile presented was based on the full population of female officials rather than an estimate.

For the qualitative strand, eight of these officials participated in key informant interviews (KIIs), selected purposively to ensure diversity of governance level (municipal, barangay captain, barangay council), length of service, and marital status. Purposive selection was guided by the principle of maximum variation to capture the range of experiences within the studied population rather than to achieve statistical representativeness. Table I presents the profiles of qualitative participants.

B. Data Collection

Demographic data were extracted from the DILG municipal registry and compiled for the full population of 26 female elected officials. Key informant interviews were conducted in person by trained research team members using a semi-structured interview guide developed to explore three domains: social challenges (role conflict, domestic burden, gender stereotypes), economic challenges (financial resources, employment history, educational background), and political challenges (electoral experiences, institutional barriers, mentorship and networks). Interviews were conducted in the participants' preferred language (Filipino or Cebuano) and audio-recorded with informed consent. Each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes. Anonymity was ensured through the use of alphanumeric codes.

C. Research Design

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed concurrently, then

TABLE I: PROFILES OF KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS (N = 8)

Code	Age	Marital Status	Position	Details	Years in Service
001	52	Married	Punong Barangay	Village chief, active in peace and order	15
002	54	Lived-in	Barangay Kagawad	Council member, community welfare	11
003	48	Married	Barangay Kagawad	Council member, social services	14
004	64	Widowed	Barangay Kagawad	Council member, senior programs	11
005	55	Married	Barangay Kagawad	Council member, livelihood programs	11
006	55	Married	Punong Barangay	Village chief, governance and safety	14
007	41	Single	Barangay Kagawad	Council member, youth sector	8
008	44	Married	Municipal Councilor	Municipal legislature, women's affairs	13

integrated in the interpretation phase to produce a more complete account of women's experiences in local governance than either strand alone could generate. The quantitative strand characterized the demographic distribution of female elected officials across the municipality; the qualitative strand explored the substantive texture of their experiences, challenges, and coping strategies through in-depth key informant interviews. The convergent design was selected because the study's conceptual framework — the Capability Approach — requires both the objective mapping of political participation patterns and the subjective understanding of the conditions under which participation occurs and capabilities are developed or constrained.

D. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to characterize the age distribution, positional distribution, and marital status profile of the complete population of female officials. Qualitative data were analyzed through a reflexive thematic analysis approach following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase protocol: familiarization, initial code generation, theme search, theme review, theme definition, and final report writing. Transcripts were read multiple times to develop initial codes, which were then grouped into initial themes through an iterative process of comparison and abstraction. Each initial theme was subsequently consolidated into a broader final theme that captured the overarching experiential pattern across the subset of significant statements. Three-column thematic matrices — comprising significant participant statements, initial themes, and final convergent themes —

were used to present the qualitative findings transparently. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings was conducted at the interpretive level, examining where demographic patterns and experiential themes converged to produce an enriched account of women's governance participation.

E. Trustworthiness of the Study

Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research ensures that findings are rigorous, authentic, and contextually meaningful. Following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative framework, this study addressed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability through systematic procedures integrated into both data collection and analysis phases:

Credibility. To ensure the internal validity and believability of the findings, the researcher employed prolonged engagement and triangulation. Initial field visits to the Municipality of Santo Tomas allowed the research team to establish rapport with local government units and community leaders, fostering an environment of trust with the eight key informants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the participants' preferred language (Filipino or Cebuano), and each interview lasted 60–90 minutes, enabling deep exploration of sensitive topics such as gender stereotypes, financial discrimination, and political marginalization. Data triangulation was achieved by comparing interview narratives with demographic profiles extracted from the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) registry, as well as with field notes and reflexive memos. Member checking was performed by returning preliminary theme

summaries to three participants, who confirmed that the interpretations accurately reflected their lived experiences. Researcher bracketing was practiced throughout analysis to suspend preconceptions and allow thematic patterns to emerge directly from the participants' voices.

Transferability. While qualitative findings are not statistically generalizable, thick description of the study's context supports transferability to analogous settings. Santo Tomas, Davao del Norte, is a rural municipality in the southern Philippines with governance structures typical of many Philippine local government units: a municipal council, barangay captains, and barangay councilors. Detailed accounts of participants' ages (41–64 years), marital status (married, widowed, single, lived-in), positions (Municipal Councilor, *punong barangay*, *barangay kagawad*), and years of service (8–15 years) are provided. The description of governance challenges — including role conflict, domestic burden, financial discrimination, and gender-based electoral skepticism — offers a rich basis for readers to assess applicability to other Philippine municipalities or to comparable rural governance contexts in Southeast Asia.

Dependability. The study's dependability was secured through a transparent and auditable research process. A complete research protocol was documented, including the interview guide, participant selection criteria, and data collection timeline. An audit trail was maintained, containing raw audio files, verbatim transcripts, three-column thematic matrices, and records of analytic decisions (e.g., how initial codes were merged into final themes). Any adjustments made during fieldwork — such as conducting interviews in two languages or scheduling sessions around participants' governance duties — were logged with justifications. This comprehensive documentation allows external reviewers to track the research process and confirms that the findings are grounded in the data rather than in researcher discretion.

Confirmability. To uphold objectivity and neutrality, the researcher kept a reflexive journal throughout the study, noting personal assumptions, emotional responses to participants' narratives, and potential biases related to gender and governance. Data interpretations were consistently grounded in verbatim excerpts, with

each theme supported by multiple participant statements. Moreover, preliminary findings were presented to a small group of participants and local government staff during a validation session; their feedback confirmed that the themes resonated with their own experiences and did not reflect researcher over-interpretation. This participatory check reinforced the confirmability of the analysis and added an ethical layer of accountability.

F. Ethical Considerations

This study adhered strictly to ethical principles governing research with human participants, particularly given the sensitive nature of gender-based political challenges. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to any data collection.

Informed consent and voluntary participation. All participants were provided with a detailed information sheet explaining the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Written informed consent was obtained from each of the eight key informants. Participants were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty or negative consequences for their political position. No coercion or inducement was used; participation was entirely voluntary.

Confidentiality and anonymity. To protect participants' identities, alphanumeric codes (001–008) were assigned in all transcripts, analysis matrices, and the final manuscript. No real names, specific addresses, or identifiable photographs were used. Any references to specific events or locations that could indirectly identify a participant were generalized or omitted. All data — audio recordings, transcripts, and demographic sheets — were stored in a password-protected computer and encrypted cloud storage accessible only to the principal researcher. Hard copies of consent forms were kept in a locked filing cabinet.

Protection of vulnerable populations. Although all participants were adult elected officials, the study remained attentive to potential psychological distress when discussing experiences of gender discrimination, financial hardship, or political ostracism. Interviewers were trained to recognize signs of discomfort and to pause or redirect the conversation as needed. No participant exhibited severe distress, but a referral

protocol to a local social worker was prepared.

Data Privacy Act compliance. The study complied with the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173). Participants were informed of their rights to access, correct, or request deletion of their data. No personal information was shared with third parties, and data were used solely for the stated research purposes.

Non-maleficence and beneficence. The research was designed to minimize any potential harm — psychological, social, or reputational. Interview questions were framed neutrally and respectfully, avoiding judgmental language. Participants were assured that their responses would not affect their standing with the local government or their political parties. As a benefit, the study offered participants an opportunity to voice their experiences and contribute to recommendations for gender-responsive governance, which could indirectly support policy improvements in their municipality.

Community transparency. While individual participation was confidential, the research objectives and general procedures were shared with the Municipal Mayor's office and the DILG local office to promote transparency and institutional support. This did not compromise the voluntary nature of individual consent, as no specific participant data were shared with these offices.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Demographic Profile of Female Elected Officials

Table II presents the age distribution of the 26 female elected officials, Table III the distribution by leadership position, and Table IV the distribution by marital status.

The age distribution reveals a pronounced concentration of female officials in middle and older age cohorts: 57.7% are aged 42–55 and 26.9% are 56 or older, while only 23.1% fall below age 41. *Barangay kagawad* is the overwhelmingly dominant position, accounting for 84.6% of all female officials; Punong Barangay represents 11.5%, and Municipal Councilor 3.8%—a pattern consistent with the inverse pyramid characteristic of the Philippine

local governance hierarchy, in which women's representation attenuates at each successive level of institutional authority. Married women constitute nearly two-thirds of the sample (65.4%), with single and widowed respondents each accounting for 15.4%.

The finding that married women constitute 65.4% of female elected officials and that 70.8% are aged 42 or above is not incidental but reflects an operative social legitimacy norm in Philippine local governance. Marriage and maturity function as credibility-conferring attributes in a political culture where leadership authority is still substantially mediated by social standing, family reputation, and perceived personal stability. This is consistent with Eagly's (2007) characterization of communal expectation effects in women's leadership: women are seen as more appropriate for public authority when their social positioning already conforms to the normative scripts of responsible adulthood. The relative underrepresentation of younger women — particularly those under 40 who might otherwise be prime career-development candidates — reflects the compounding of youthful inexperience expectations with the heightened domestic burden that younger married women typically carry, consistent with Smith's (2018) findings on the temporal sequencing of women's leadership entry

B. Social Challenges and Coping Strategies

Table 5 presents the thematic matrix for the social dimension. Three final themes emerged: (1) Breaking Gender Barriers: Empowering Women in Leadership and Peace; (2) Navigating Dual Identities and Maternal Empowerment in Leadership; and (3) Unveiling the Tapestry of Empowered Leadership.

The social and political themes converge on a pattern of competence-based legitimacy building as the primary strategy through which women dismantle gender stereotypes in their governance domains. Across multiple participants, the initial skepticism of male colleagues and constituents about women's suitability for demanding roles — particularly in peace and order — was overcome not through argument or appeal to formal authority but through demonstrated performance. Code 001's account of her integration into buy-bust operations, CIDG collaboration, and PDEA activities as a *Barangay Kagawad* — activities

TABLE II: AGE DISTRIBUTION OF FEMALE ELECTED OFFICIALS IN SANTO TOMAS, DAVAO DEL NORTE (N = 26)

Age Group	n	% of Total	Cumulative %
<i>Younger cohort (≤41)</i>			
26–33	3	11.5	11.5
34–41	3	11.5	23.1
<i>Middle cohort (42–55)</i>			
42–49	8	30.8	53.8
50–55	7	26.9	80.8
<i>Older cohort (≥56)</i>			
56–66	7	26.9	100.0
Total	26	100.0	—

TABLE III: DISTRIBUTION BY LEADERSHIP POSITION (N = 26)

Position	n	% of Total	Cumulative %
<i>Barangay Kagawad (Barangay Councilor)</i>	22	84.6	84.6
<i>Punong Barangay (Barangay Captain)</i>	3	11.5	96.2
Municipal Councilor	1	3.8	100.0
Total	26	100.0	—

TABLE IV: DISTRIBUTION BY MARITAL STATUS (N = 26)

Marital Status	n	% of Total	Cumulative %
Married	17	65.4	65.4
Single	4	15.4	80.8
Widowed	4	15.4	96.2
Lived-in	1	3.8	100.0
Total	26	100.0	—

described as rare for women due to physical risk — exemplifies this strategy. The skepticism she faced was dissolved by what her colleagues experienced as surprising competence: her speed, efficiency, and decisiveness in responding to security situations exceeded their gender-based predictions. This pattern — initial resistance, performance-based credibility gain, retrospective acknowledgment — appears across multiple participants and across both social and political domains.

This finding resonates with Johnson's (2020) analysis of women in peace and security roles, which identifies performance-based legitimacy as the dominant pathway for women entering masculine-coded professional domains when mentorship pathways are absent. It also connects to Fox and Lawless's (2007) observation that women seeking political office must overcome an initial credibility threshold that male candidates are not routinely required to cross — a threshold that the participants in this study navigated through sustained operational excellence rather than through institutional support. The absence of formal mentorship is notable across participants' accounts: where networks and guidance are mentioned, they are self-organized or peer-based rather than institutionally provided, consistent

with Allen's (2007) identification of the mentorship gap as a persistent structural deficit for women in leadership development.

C. Economic Challenges and Coping Strategies

Table 6 presents the thematic matrix for the economic dimension. Two final themes emerged: (1) Redefining Roles, Shattering Stereotypes, and Striving for Excellence; and (2) Triumph over Adversity in the Face of Economic and Professional Hurdles.

The economic themes surface a dimension of women's leadership challenge that the governance literature frequently notes but rarely explores with the granularity that the key informant narratives provide. Financial discrimination in credit access — documented in the account of code 001, who faced discriminatory terms when borrowing money — is not merely an inconvenience but a structural barrier to the material foundation that leadership activities require: campaign funding, community engagement events, transportation, and the maintenance of the organizational presence that elected officials must sustain. Fox and Lawless (2007) establish that financial constraints are among the most significant barriers to women seeking political office; the present data add the dimension that these constraints persist

TABLE V: THEMATIC MATRIX: SOCIAL CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES OF WOMEN IN LOCAL POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Significant Statement (Participant Excerpt)	Initial Theme	Final Theme
"As a woman and an empowered one, particularly in the political realm, during my tenure as a Barangay Kagawad, I was assigned to oversee the Committee on Peace and Order. I actively participated in buy-bust operations with the PNP, collaborated with the CIDG and PDEA during search warrant executions and arrests. It was rare for a woman to be involved in such activities... Despite the challenges, I persevered."	Breaking Gender Norms and Balancing Responsibilities	Breaking Gender Barriers: Empowering Women in Leadership and Peace
"When I first won, this job related to peace and order was typically handled by men... They were initially hesitant about me. They were impressed because, as a woman, they thought I was quick and efficient in responding to situations."	Breaking Gender Stereotypes in Peace and Order	
"I started as a barangay watchman, then became the chairman and, eventually, the chief watchman. They say I am a woman, but they also say I handle it very well. I can manage it efficiently, responding promptly to incidents."	Breaking Gender Barriers in Peace and Order Leadership	
"As a woman, being a wife is a distinct role for me. When I am at home, I assume the role of a wife — I have to be submissive because the Bible mandates it. However, when I go out, I must project a different persona. As the leader of the barangay, I need to act assertively, demonstrating strength and firmness."	Navigating Dual Identities: Wife and Leader	Navigating Dual Identities and Maternal Empowerment in Leadership
"As a woman, I began my journey as a leader right from my family. At a young age, I became a widow and had to take on the role of a leader... despite being alone, I successfully exerted efforts to provide for and nurture my children."	Maternal Empowerment and Leadership Resilience	
"What men can do, women can do as well. It is possible. Like us barangay officials, men have predominantly held these positions in the past. However, women now have these roles. There has been an increase in female officials because women are eager to participate. They want to show their strength."	Breaking Gender Norms in Leadership Roles	Unveiling the Tapestry of Empowered Leadership
"As a woman, I also experience tears, feelings of rejection, and appreciation from others that motivate and challenge me."	The Emotional Tapestry of Womanhood in Leadership	
"In my decision-making, I prioritize the general welfare, especially for women. When leading events for women, I show that as women leaders, we can handle challenges with resilience."	Empowering Women Through Decision-Making	

not only at the entry point of candidacy but throughout the term of office.

The educational dimension of economic disadvantage is particularly notable in this sample. Several participants held only elementary or secondary qualifications at the time of their election, and the accounts of navigating professional life with limited formal credentials reveal both the genuine barriers this creates — to employment stability, institutional networks, and the credibility that formal qualifications confer in some governance contexts — and the adaptive responses through which women redefine the basis of their professional worth. The participant who explicitly articulates that personal worth is not solely based on educational attainment (code 007) is engaging in what Walker and Jones (2020) describe as credential de-centering: the reorientation of self-assessed competence from formal qualification to accumulated practical experience. This is an adaptive strategy of real

significance, because it enables women to maintain the self-efficacy necessary for sustained political engagement even in the absence of the formal educational capital that would conventionally validate their authority. However, it should not be naturalized as an adequate institutional response: that women must develop alternative legitimacy frameworks to compensate for educational disadvantage reflects a failure of equitable access to education and professional development that gender-responsive governance must address at the structural level rather than simply relying on individual adaptability.

D. Political Challenges and Coping Strategies

Table 7 presents the thematic matrix for the political dimension. Three final themes emerged: (1) Triumphs, Sacrifices, and Shifting Perceptions; (2) Gender Equality, Stereotype Breakdown, and Fostering Inclusive Governance; and (3) Breaking Emotional Stereotypes and

TABLE VI: THEMATIC MATRIX: ECONOMIC CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES OF WOMEN IN LOCAL POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Significant Statement (Participant Excerpt)	Initial Theme	Final Theme
<i>"As women, we should find ways to contribute within the household and assist our partners to ease their burden. It is not just about being confined to domestic roles but also about providing additional income. So, I also encourage them to engage in livelihood activities."</i>	Empowering Women Beyond Domestic Boundaries	Redefining Roles, Shattering Stereotypes, and Striving for Excellence
<i>"I always consider my husband's job to be my job, too. I do not want others to think, 'You are just here at home with no other job.' I do not want to be looked down upon because of that."</i>	Defying Stereotypes and Valuing Domestic Labor	
<i>"There are times when we openly admit that, as women, we might be unable to handle everything — cumbersome tasks, physical ones. We acknowledge that. However, we will do our best to manage and overcome when possible."</i>	Acknowledging Limits and Striving for Excellence	
<i>"In terms of economics, it is challenging. When I borrow money, I face severe discrimination in terms of repayment terms. It is disheartening. Despite whatever stories they tell or whatever they say, it only motivates me even more to strive harder."</i>	Overcoming Economic Challenges with Determination	Triumph over Adversity in the Face of Economic and Professional Hurdles
<i>"Applying for a job in the past, especially with a less prestigious educational background, often led to being set aside... I initially faced difficulties securing a stable job."</i>	Navigating Professional Challenges with Patience and Perseverance	
<i>"I do not have a degree. I only finished high school. However, through my experiences, I have faced and overcome many challenges... I have realized that a person's worth is not solely based on educational attainment."</i>	Redefining Worth Beyond Educational Attainment	

TABLE VII: THEMATIC MATRIX: POLITICAL CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES OF WOMEN IN LOCAL POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Significant Statement (Participant Excerpt)	Initial Theme	Final Theme
<i>"In politics, I emerged victorious and witnessed those who mocked and rejected me. I understood it was not personal... there are no permanent friends or enemies. Because I do not want to be a hypocrite."</i>	Triumph, Resilience, and Political Realities	Triumphs, Sacrifices, and Shifting Perceptions
<i>"Politics is not a privilege but a sacrifice because you will serve a large population. It is my passion."</i>	Politics as Sacrifice and Passionate Service	
<i>"In the recent election, even your fellow politicians may run against you... they campaigned against me, but the people said I am good and have helped many."</i>	Public Perception Triumphs over Political Rivalry	
<i>"There is no discrimination against women; that is what I always say. Whatever a man can do, a woman can do. When I entered politics, I did not just run for election; I ran because I genuinely wanted to address the needs of the people."</i>	Gender Equality and Empowerment in Political Leadership	Gender Equality, Stereotype Breakdown, and Fostering Inclusive Governance
<i>"When I was running for Barangay Captain, they would say, 'What can she handle? She is just a woman.' They doubted my ability to lead a large barangay... That motivated me. I wanted to prove them wrong and show them that despite their perceptions, I am capable."</i>	Breaking Gender Stereotypes in Leadership	
<i>"We entered politics with the understanding that it is a collective effort. Whether you are male or female, the work is the same. It depends on how we attend to the needs of the people."</i>	Collective Responsibility and Inclusive Governance	
<i>"They would say, 'She cannot be a Barangay Captain because she easily cries.' They thought I was too emotional... However, I show them that I can."</i>	Breaking Emotional Stereotypes in Leadership	Breaking Emotional Stereotypes and Empowering Political Engagement
<i>"In the realm of politics, in the past, I used to be very shy and not very confident in speaking... However, when I joined politics, I learned and improved myself."</i>	Empowerment Through Political Engagement	

Empowering Political Engagement.

The political themes reveal a consistent psychological dynamic across participants: the

experience of being doubted, dismissed, or challenged on gender grounds is systematically recounted not as a discouraging barrier but as a

motivating force. Candidates told they cannot manage a large barangay because they are women respond by channeling the doubt into intensified resolve. The participant who was told she was too emotional to be a leader (code 007) describes the comment as hurtful but ultimately mobilizing. This pattern of adversity-to-motivation conversion is consistent with Eagly's (2009) analysis of how women in leadership contexts develop resilience resources precisely in response to the heightened challenges they face, and with Jones's (2019) qualitative findings on Filipino women's political agency.

However, the normalization of this resilience requirement merits critical attention. If the primary pathway through which women access and sustain political credibility is the conversion of gender-based doubt into personal motivation — if women must be doubted before they can prove themselves, and must prove themselves at every appointment where men are simply assumed capable — then the governance system is imposing a systematic additional cognitive and emotional burden on women that constitutes a structural inequality regardless of its individual motivational by-products. The World Bank (2019) analysis of barriers to women's political and economic participation identifies precisely this dynamic as a hidden cost of gender inequality: the energy expended in managing discrimination and building alternative legitimacy is energy that cannot be directed toward governance effectiveness itself. Mentorship programs, as UN Women (2020) emphasizes, are not supplementary but foundational — they can redistribute the burden of legitimacy building from individual women to institutional support systems, enabling women to develop their leadership capabilities in contexts that assume their competence rather than requiring them to prove it.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the social, economic, and political challenges of women in local political leadership in Santo Tomas, Davao del Norte, through a convergent mixed-methods design that integrates demographic profiling with thematic analysis of lived experience. The

findings establish three principal conclusions.

First, the concentration of female officials in middle and older age groups and in lower-tier governance positions (*barangay kagawad*) reflects operative social legitimacy norms that associate women's political authority with maturity and marital status — a pattern that systematically disadvantages younger women and limits women's advancement to higher governance tiers. This demographic pattern is not a natural outcome of women's preferences but a structural product of the social conditions under which women's political candidacy and effectiveness are evaluated.

Second, women leaders in this context develop three primary capability-building strategies in response to structural constraint: competence-based legitimacy building through demonstrated operational excellence; identity management that navigates the contradictory role demands of domestic and public life; and the conversion of gender-based skepticism into motivational resolve. These strategies are individually accomplished and collectively insufficient — they enable women to participate despite structural barriers rather than eliminating those barriers. Gender-responsive governance must therefore move beyond celebrating women's resilience to addressing the institutional conditions that make such resilience necessary.

Third, the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings confirms that effective gender-responsive governance in the Philippine local context requires targeted financial support for women candidates and office-holders, institutionalized mentorship pathways that relieve women of the burden of self-organized network building, and work-family policy reforms that enable women to sustain political participation without bearing disproportionate personal costs. These recommendations are grounded in the Capability Approach's insistence that substantive freedom — not merely formal access — is the appropriate metric for evaluating gender equality in governance.

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