

Participation of women members of the parliament in peacebuilding efforts: The case of Bangsamoro government

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Abstract: This study explores the participation of Bangsamoro women Members of Parliament (MPs) in governance and peacebuilding efforts within the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). It examines the effectiveness of their involvement in peacebuilding, the challenges they encounter, and their recommendations for improving their political participation. The findings reveal that despite a male-dominated political landscape, women MPs actively contribute to policymaking, legislation, and advocating for gender equality. Their participation has positively impacted peacebuilding efforts by pushing for policies that protect women's rights and promote inclusive governance. However, women MPs face significant barriers, including societal norms, cultural practices, and institutional biases that marginalize their voices. Strategies such as community consultations, legal and religious advocacy, empowerment through training, and mentorship have been employed to overcome these challenges. The study concludes with recommendations for enhancing women's political participation, including continued education, stronger relationships with constituents, and promoting moral governance. These efforts are crucial for advancing gender equality and fostering a more inclusive and effective political environment in the BARMM.

Keywords: Bangsamoro women, Members of parliament, Participation, Peacebuilding efforts.

1. Introduction

Women constitute only 25% of all national parliaments worldwide, and a notable increase from 11% in 1995. While this reflects a significant rise in women's participation, providing them greater opportunities in decision-making processes, the pace of progress remains slow [1]. Parliament plays a pivotal role in setting a country's policy direction. A democratic parliament reflects the diverse views and interests of society, allowing these perspectives to shape its social, political, and economic future. Research [2] highlights that when women participate in all aspects of political life, including as members of parliament, societies become more equitable, and democracy is strengthened.

In the Philippines, the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) established the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) after its ratification on January 25, 2019. This development followed decades of struggle for autonomy. On February 22, 2019, the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA), the interim regional parliament, officially took office. This included the swearing-in of the chief minister, cabinet, and parliament members [3].

In the newly formed BARMM, women initially made up 16.2% (13 out of 80 members) of the Parliament. This figure falls short of the 30% "critical mass" scholars identify as the minimum threshold for minority groups to influence decision-making effectively. Notably, the 80 members of the BTA were appointed by the national government, marking a first in the country. On November 17, 2020, during the BTA's second regular session, Resolution 93 was adopted. It urged the Philippine House of

Representatives and Senate to extend the BARMM transition period to June 30, 2025, allowing the BTA more time to fulfill its mandate. Following this extension, the number of Bangsamoro women in Parliament increased to 20% (16 out of 80 members) [4-5].

The Bangsamoro Organic Law stipulates that the government must “ensure the inclusion of women’s agenda and the involvement of women and youth in the electoral nominating process of political parties” (Republic Act No. 11054, art.7). However, this provision is vague, with the only concrete measure being the allocation of a reserved seat for women in the future Bangsamoro Parliament. While this reservation reflects a gender-inclusive effort, it risks being seen as tokenistic. A single-reserved seat is insufficient to encompass the broader concept of women’s representation. Nonetheless, this provision symbolizes hope and the ongoing struggle of women’s rights groups to achieve meaningful recognition in the Bangsamoro Parliament [6].

The study aimed to determine the participation of the Bangsamoro women in the peacebuilding efforts of the Bangsamoro Government during the transition period. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions; (1) What is the participation of the Bangsamoro women members of the Parliament? (2) How effective is their participation on peacebuilding as perceived by the women members of the parliament? (3) What are the challenges encountered by Bangsamoro women members of the Parliament? and (4) What are the recommendations of the Bangsamoro women members of the parliament to address the challenges?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The objective of this research is to examine the involvement of Bangsamoro women in peacebuilding endeavors, focusing on the roles and mechanisms by which Bangsamoro women parliamentarians contribute to peacebuilding initiatives. This study employs a qualitative research methodology, as it aims to explore the needs and perspectives of Bangsamoro Women Parliament Members. Qualitative methods are particularly suitable for this study because they allow for the in-depth exploration of personal narratives, which is essential to understanding women’s participation and experiences in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao [7]. By analyzing the lived experiences of women parliamentarians, the study seeks to generate meaningful insights into their contributions to peacebuilding efforts in BARMM [8].

2.2. Research Instrument

The interview focused on exploring the participation of Bangsamoro women members of parliament in peacebuilding efforts, the effectiveness of their contributions, and the challenges they have encountered. To ensure validity, the guide questions underwent a thorough validation process prior to implementation. The primary instrument used in this research was an interview guide designed to facilitate the discussion. The researcher developed open-ended questions that were posed to participants, allowing them to express their thoughts, feelings, and perspectives on the topic. Open-ended questions were particularly effective as they provided participants the flexibility to elaborate on their experiences, enabling the researcher to address the study’s research objectives comprehensively [7-8].

2.3. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, widely used in phenomenological studies, was employed to identify, analyze, and interpret common patterns in qualitative data. This approach helped report the extent and effectiveness of Bangsamoro women parliamentarians' participation in policymaking, resolution drafting, bill creation, and advocacy for women's rights and welfare. It also addressed their efforts in eliminating discrimination against women, promoting gender development, and overcoming the challenges they faced, as well as the strategies they employed.

The first step in thematic analysis involved familiarizing oneself with the data to understand its depth and breadth. This process included repeated reading of the data to identify initial patterns and insights. Next, codes were generated. A code represents a fundamental segment of the raw data, used to

identify recurring themes. These themes were reviewed, refined, and then systematically presented in the research report [9-10].

The second step involved an in-depth analysis of the data. Responses were read and re-read to extract significant meanings related to the phenomenon under study. This stage considered both similarities and differences in participants' perspectives, while paying close attention to key narratives and points emphasized by the respondents.

In the third step, codes were systematically developed from the data. Codes typically consisted of words or short phrases summarizing the essence of the participants' responses in the transcribed interviews. The coding process was conducted in two cycles. In the first cycle, codes ranged from single words to full sentences or entire passages. The second cycle involved re-coding and refining the initial codes, applying them to larger units of text or modifying them to reflect more nuanced themes [11].

The fourth step involved organizing and analyzing the coded data to identify and categorize themes. These themes were then sorted systematically, with summaries and visualizations created to represent the data clearly. Descriptive analysis was used to synthesize participants' responses, aligning them with the research objectives.

Finally, the results were presented in the study. Themes derived from the analysis were directly tied to the research questions, filling identified gaps and providing insights into the studied phenomenon. The findings from participants' responses offered critical insights into the experiences of Bangsamoro women parliamentarians, informing recommendations for interventions and future research.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

Before conducting the research interviews, the researcher sent an official letter to the Bangsamoro women members of parliament. The letter, signed by the researcher's adviser, included an interview guide to allow the participants to review the questions in advance. Following this, the researcher met with the parliament members in their offices to explain the purpose of the research and provide written assurances that their responses would remain confidential. Permission to conduct the interviews was granted.

Adherence to ethical standards is paramount in research to prevent unethical practices and ensure credibility. Ethical norms, such as maintaining confidentiality and obtaining informed consent, discourage data fabrication and promote the pursuit of knowledge and truth [12]. Furthermore, ethical research practices foster trust, accountability, and mutual respect among researchers and participants, creating a supportive climate for academic inquiry [13].

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Bangsamoro Women's Participation in Peacebuilding

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the participation of Bangsamoro women in peacebuilding within the BARMM government. It examines their roles in policymaking, resolution drafting, legislative reform, and promoting gender equity, as well as the challenges they face in a male-dominated political landscape. By employing qualitative methods, the study highlights their significant contributions to legislative reforms and socio-political transformation in a region historically affected by conflict and gender inequity. The analysis highlighted the resilience, leadership, and commitment of Bangsamoro women to fostering peace and development. The following were the essential themes emerged during the analysis of the responses of the participants.

3.1.1. Participation in Policymaking

In policymaking, Bangsamoro women members of parliament (MPs) are not mere participants but drivers of change. They advocate for gender-sensitive policies addressing women's health, education, and economic empowerment. According to the participant, collaboration transcends political affiliations to prioritize women's issues, with key initiatives like the Bangsamoro Electoral Code ensuring a minimum of 30% women nominees by political parties. Such provisions are aligned with studies showing that increasing women's political participation leads to more inclusive and representative governance

[14]. Similarly, mandated platforms for women's issues in political parties underscore the MPs' commitment to advancing gender equality.

Research highlights that women's participation in policymaking enhances democratic governance by diversifying perspectives and fostering policies responsive to societal needs [15]. The MPs' active engagement in drafting and debating policies ensures that women's voices shape the region's governance, fostering inclusivity and gender-sensitive policy frameworks.

3.1.2. Contribution to Resolution Making

The passage of resolutions that acknowledge and support women's roles in governance represents another key achievement. Resolutions, though often symbolic, serve as a foundation for legislative and societal shifts towards gender inclusivity. Participant noted that while many resolutions focus on symbolic expressions, there is potential for them to evolve into more substantive contributions to gender-responsive policies. This aligns with findings that resolutions recognizing women's roles can act as catalysts for broader institutional change [16].

3.1.3. Drafting of Bills

Bangsamoro women MPs have been instrumental in drafting bills addressing issues such as gender-based violence, education, and employment equality. Their proactive approach ensures that legislation reflects the multifaceted challenges faced by women in BARMM. Research indicates that when women are involved in legislative processes, they often prioritize social welfare policies, particularly those addressing inequality and discrimination [17]. By advocating for and enacting gender-sensitive laws, women MPs contribute to fostering governance that upholds the rights and welfare of all citizens, particularly women.

Through their legislative efforts, these MPs exemplify the transformative impact of women in leadership. Their active participation in drafting and passing laws showcases their role in shaping a more equitable society, consistent with the findings of studies on women's influence in governance [18].

3.1.4. Upholding Women's Right and Welfare

The active involvement of Bangsamoro women MPs in advocating for women's rights and welfare underscores their vital role in advancing gender equity. Their participation in legislative processes ensures that policies address gender-based violence, promote equal opportunities, and uphold women's rights. Studies have shown that women's leadership contributes significantly to reducing gender disparities, creating environments that foster equality and social justice [1].

Women's participation also extends beyond legislative chambers to grassroots movements and community initiatives. Their advocacy amplifies marginalized voices, challenges discriminatory norms, and mobilizes resources to address societal inequities [19]. In BARMM, this grassroots engagement complements legislative efforts, fostering a holistic approach to gender and development.

3.1.5. Eliminating Discrimination Against Women

The active and meaningful participation of women members of parliament is vital in efforts to eliminate discrimination against women. As legislators, they play a critical role in shaping policies, enacting laws, and fostering an inclusive legislative environment that addresses gender disparities and promotes equality.

Women parliamentarians bring unique perspectives and insights to the legislative process, ensuring that issues affecting women are prioritized. Their presence in governance contributes to laws that protect women's rights, challenge discriminatory practices, and create a legal framework conducive to gender equality [15]. Studies underscore that increasing women's representation in politics leads to more comprehensive policies that benefit marginalized groups, including women and children [1].

Furthermore, women MPs act as role models, inspiring other women to engage in politics and public service. Their leadership challenges stereotypes and paves the way for increased representation of women in governance, fostering a more inclusive political environment (Barnes & Beaulieu, 2019).

Through legislative advocacy, women MPs address critical issues like gender-based violence, unequal pay, and limited access to education and healthcare. They champion policies that empower women, enhance participation in decision-making processes, and ensure equal opportunities across all sectors of society. For example, initiatives targeting economic empowerment and protection from violence have proven effective when women parliamentarians actively support and promote them [20].

Women MPs also contribute significantly to raising awareness about gender inequality through advocacy within and outside parliamentary settings. By challenging societal norms and fostering cultural shifts, they drive the transformation toward a more equitable and just society [18]. Their multifaceted roles as legislators, advocates, and influencers are instrumental in combating discrimination and advancing gender equality.

3.1.6. Promoting Gender and Development

The participation of women in parliament is a cornerstone for promoting gender and development. Women MPs ensure that policymaking encompasses a broader and more equitable approach to societal progress, addressing the unique challenges faced by women. Active engagement in legislative processes allows women MPs to shape policies promoting gender equality and sustainable development. Their influence goes beyond representation as they advocate for initiatives that ensure equal access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities while combating gender-based violence [19]. Women's contributions to policy discussions and decision-making bodies bring attention to systemic inequalities, fostering long-term solutions for gender parity.

Women in parliament also act as role models, inspiring younger generations to pursue leadership roles and participate in community development. By breaking traditional gender stereotypes, they contribute to creating an inclusive political landscape that benefits all members of society [16].

Additionally, women MPs champion initiatives that bridge gender gaps in economic participation and promote entrepreneurial opportunities. Studies have shown that when women are empowered through legislative support, the overall socio-economic conditions of communities improve [21]. Women's advocacy for work-life balance policies and gender-responsive budgeting demonstrates their commitment to holistic development strategies that account for diverse societal needs.

Collaboration among women MPs also strengthens their impact on gender and development. By working across party lines, women legislators emphasize shared goals, such as promoting gender equity, fostering education, and addressing health disparities [14]. This collaborative approach not only builds consensus but also highlights the transformative potential of women in leadership positions.

The active participation of women MPs is indispensable in advancing gender and development. Their advocacy, legislative work, and leadership foster societies that are inclusive, just, and responsive to the needs of all citizens, irrespective of gender. By promoting sustainable policies, women in parliament help create resilient communities where gender equity is both a goal and a reality.

3.2. Effective Participation in Peacebuilding

Women's participation in peacebuilding is instrumental in addressing systemic inequalities and fostering sustainable societal transformation. Their roles in policymaking, resolution-making, drafting of bills, upholding women's rights, eliminating discrimination, and promoting gender equality underscore their multifaceted contributions to both governance and post-conflict reconstruction. The following were the essential themes emerged during the analysis of the responses of the participants.

3.2.1. Policymaking and Advocacy for Gender Equity

The collaborative efforts of women Members of Parliament in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao transcend political affiliations, driven by a shared commitment to advancing women's rights. Through inclusive policymaking, women MPs prioritize laws and programs that address gender-based violence, economic inequality, and unequal access to healthcare and education. Their collective advocacy serves as a model for fostering equity in politically complex regions [22].

3.2.2. Resolution-Making

Resolutions serve as key tools in recognizing and institutionalizing women's roles in governance. While many current resolutions may be symbolic, women MPs in BARMM are increasingly advocating for substantive measures that address pressing social issues, including gender disparities and systemic discrimination. This shift reflects a broader commitment to actionable change through gender-responsive governance [18].

3.2.3. Drafting Bills and Legislative Effectiveness

Women MPs play a vital role in drafting bills that address the unique challenges faced by women in BARMM. Legislative efforts focus on combating gender-based violence, promoting economic empowerment, and ensuring equitable access to essential services. For example, the inclusion of women-centric provisions in legislation exemplifies their success in integrating gender perspectives into policymaking. The proactive involvement of women MPs underscores their leadership in fostering long-term societal transformation [20].

3.2.4. Upholding Women's Rights and Welfare

In peacebuilding contexts, women contribute significantly to upholding rights and welfare by advocating for justice and social cohesion. Their participation ensures that policies address critical issues such as displacement, access to education, and protection from violence. By challenging traditional norms, women in BARMM help create equitable post-conflict societies that prioritize the dignity and welfare of all individuals [19].

3.2.5. Eliminating Discrimination Against Women

The active involvement of women in peacebuilding processes is crucial for eliminating discrimination. By participating in decision-making, women address the root causes of bias and work to dismantle societal norms that perpetuate inequality. Their efforts include advocating for legal frameworks that condemn discrimination and promote accountability for gender-based injustices. This multifaceted approach fosters cultural shifts toward inclusivity and justice [1].

3.2.6. Promoting Gender and Development

Women's participation in peacebuilding significantly contributes to sustainable development by integrating gender perspectives into economic, social, and political policies. Women MPs in BARMM champion initiatives aimed at bridging gender gaps in education, healthcare, and economic participation. Their advocacy for gender-sensitive budgeting and resource allocation underscores their role in promoting equity-driven development strategies. By inspiring future generations, they act as catalysts for long-term societal advancement [21].

3.3. Challenges Encountered by the Bangsamoro Women's Members of the Parliament in its Peacebuilding Efforts

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) presents a political landscape heavily influenced by male dominance; a pattern prevalent in many parts of the world. This gender imbalance presents substantial challenges for women Members of Parliament (MPs) who struggle to assert their presence and impact decision-making processes. The predominance of male leaders often leads to the marginalization of women's perspectives, making it difficult for female parliamentarians to have their voices heard in political forums [22].

In this male-dominated environment, women MPs encounter a host of challenges. They are often expected to conform to entrenched gender roles that favor male leadership and authority, a reflection of broader societal biases that prioritize men's participation in political spaces. This issue is compounded by the region's cultural norms and traditional expectations, which limit the ability of women to effectively engage in governance [23]. For instance, traditional views that associate leadership with masculinity further restrict women's political engagement, reinforcing a cycle of underrepresentation and exclusion.

Despite these barriers, women MPs in BARMM are persistently challenging these norms. They are working to assert their presence in the political sphere, demonstrating resilience and determination in breaking down the gendered barriers that hinder their participation in decision-making processes. By advocating for policies that prioritize women's rights and pushing for reforms that address gender disparities, they are gradually transforming the political landscape in the region. Their efforts highlight the need for continued work to overcome these structural barriers, ensuring the full and meaningful participation of women in governance [24]. The following were the essential themes emerged during the analysis of the responses of the participants.

3.3.1. Social Norms and Cultural Practices

The deeply rooted social norms and cultural practices in BARMM further exacerbate the challenges faced by women in the political arena. These traditions often dictate rigid gender roles that discourage women from pursuing political careers or taking on leadership positions. Such norms can be particularly discouraging for women who aspire to enter male-dominated spaces such as politics, where they are often seen as "outsiders" [25]. Women's participation in governance is still viewed by some as counterproductive to the traditional family roles, reinforcing the stereotype that politics is not an appropriate domain for women.

Despite these significant obstacles, Bangsamoro women MPs and their allies are committed to challenging and reshaping these traditional norms. Their efforts are marked by resilience and a strategic push to reframe the political discourse, creating space for women to engage actively in the governance process. These women have embarked on a gradual but determined journey to shift cultural attitudes toward women's political involvement. They leverage public awareness campaigns, grassroots outreach, and collaborations with civil society groups to foster an inclusive political environment [26]. By pushing against these cultural barriers, they are not only advocating for their rights but also paving the way for future generations of women leaders in BARMM.

The resilience shown by these women MPs is noteworthy, as they have managed to inspire greater participation among women in local and national politics. Their ongoing work has contributed to a shift in perceptions, challenging the status quo and opening doors for more inclusive governance. Their progress offers hope for a future in which women are fully represented and actively involved in shaping political decisions in BARMM and beyond [27].

3.3.2. Strategies for Implementing Peacebuilding Efforts

While the challenges of a male-dominated political environment and cultural constraints are considerable, Bangsamoro women MPs have adopted various strategies to promote their peacebuilding efforts. One of the critical challenges in peacebuilding within the region is overcoming institutional barriers that limit women's participation in political processes. However, these women MPs have taken a proactive approach by using their legislative positions to advocate for gender-sensitive policies that prioritize peacebuilding and the inclusion of women's voices [28].

Women MPs have also formed coalitions with civil society organizations and international partners to increase the effectiveness of their peacebuilding initiatives. These collaborations ensure that peace processes include provisions for gender equality and the protection of women's rights, such as addressing gender-based violence and ensuring equal access to political representation [29]. Furthermore, the introduction of gender-sensitive committees within political parties has been a strategic move to institutionalize women's representation and influence in the peacebuilding process [30].

Their ongoing efforts underscore the transformative role that women can play in peacebuilding by ensuring that the perspectives and needs of women are integrated into the broader peace and security frameworks. Through these strategies, Bangsamoro women MPs have positioned themselves as key players in the political landscape, influencing not only peacebuilding but also the overall governance structure in BARMM.

3.4. Recommendations to Address Challenges Faced by Bangsamoro Women MPs

Despite the challenges, Bangsamoro women MPs actively contribute to governance and peacebuilding. Their involvement in policymaking, legislation, and gender equality advocacy plays a key role in advancing peace initiatives and ensuring women's rights are integrated into the region's political and security frameworks [24]. To further enhance women's participation, the following strategies are recommended by the participants: sustain education and learning programs to equip women MPs with the skills needed for effective political engagement; strengthen relationships with constituents to ensure policies reflect the needs of the community; conduct research on community perceptions to assess progress and challenges in public acceptance of female leaders; and promote moral governance by emphasizing accountability, transparency, and accessibility in parliamentary activities. These strategies collectively foster an inclusive political environment where women MPs can fully participate and contribute to peacebuilding and governance. The following were the essential themes emerged during the analysis of the responses of the participants.

3.4.1. Community Consultations and Engagement

Community consultations engage local populations, including community leaders and religious figures, to raise awareness about the importance of women's political participation. These consultations foster understanding and support for women MPs, especially in regions with strong traditional norms [31].

3.4.2. Knowledge Sharing and Information Dissemination

Disseminating information through media campaigns, public forums, and educational programs helps challenge stereotypes and biases about women in politics. Highlighting successful women leaders in the Bangsamoro region helps shift public perceptions and encourages greater acceptance of women MPs [26;28].

3.4.3. Legal and Religious Advocacy for Women's Rights

Advocating for women's rights through both legal frameworks like the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) and religious principles rooted in Islam has proven effective. This dual approach helps align gender equality with local cultural and religious values, making it more widely accepted [23;27].

3.4.4. Empowerment through Leadership Training and Mentorship

Empowerment programs, including leadership training and mentorship, equip women MPs with the skills necessary to navigate political spaces. These initiatives build confidence and create networks that reduce systemic barriers to women's political participation [25].

4. Conclusion

The study reveals that Bangsamoro women Members of Parliament actively participate in governance and peacebuilding efforts, contributing to policymaking, legislation, and the promotion of gender equality. Their involvement has been effective in advancing peace initiatives, particularly through advocacy for women's rights and inclusion in peace and security frameworks. However, they face significant challenges, including a male-dominated political environment, entrenched social norms, and cultural practices that hinder their full participation. Despite these barriers, the women MPs demonstrate resilience and strategic efforts, such as community engagement, legal advocacy, and leadership training, to overcome these challenges. The recommendations provided by the women MPs emphasize the importance of continuous education, strengthening relationships with constituents, and fostering moral governance to further enhance their participation and effectiveness in the political arena.

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