Research Article

Background, Recruitment, and Perceived Factors for Winning: A Qualitative Inquiry into the Perspectives of Local Women Politicians (LWPs) in Northern Mindanao, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Despite being globally acknowledged as one of the more gender-equal societies, the Philippines faces persistent challenges in achieving gender parity, especially in political representation, which necessitates a deeper investigation into women's political participation at the local level. This study delves into the nuanced dynamics of local women politicians (LWPs), examining their political background, recruitment into politics, and perceived factors for electoral success. Utilizing a phenomenological research design, the study aims to articulate and comprehend the essence of LWPs' lived experiences. Grounded in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the methodological framework facilitates a nuanced understanding of individual and societal realms. Six LWPs from Bukidnon, Northern Mindanao, participated in the study to comprehensively explore commonalities and distinctions in their political experiences. The findings revealed five themes of LWPs' political background: apolitical origins, entry into politics during young adulthood, involvement in philanthropy, membership in political families, and substantial political experience. The political recruitment of LWPs is revealed through the support of the church and the influence of political families. Additionally, LWPs' perceived factors for winning in electoral politics encompass three key themes: membership in a political family, philanthropic endeavors, and the prevalence of money politics. The lived experiences of LWPs resonate with prior research on "kinship politics" in the Philippines, illustrating how political power is bequeathed, inherited, and cycled within prominent political clans. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on women's political participation by offering a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the multifaceted factors influencing their engagement in local politics.

Keywords: Gender studies, Local politics, political participation of women, Women in politics

Introduction

Studies on women's representation argue that the inclusion of women in elected posts is crucial for the progress of democracy and development, and it also has symbolic importance for future generations. Women's involvement in electoral politics is essential for strengthening democracy, as they make up half of the population and need proper representation in political processes (Franco & Laguna, 2023). In developing countries, the growing presence of women in governmental positions in developing countries has resulted in improved delivery of public services, particularly in the domains of education and healthcare (Hessami & Lopes de Fonseca, 2020). However, Bhaskar, & Kaushik (2022) argued that some developing countries in Asia such as India, consider recognition of women leaders in the 21st century still a "distant dream". The Philippines ranks among the foremost nations globally in terms of female political representation, securing the sixteenth position among 146 economies as the world's most gender-equal society in the latest World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Index Report (GGGR) (Abad, 2023). In recent years, Filipinas have increasingly engaged in broader political roles, manifesting a heightened presence in the Philippine bureaucracy and successfully advocating for the enactment of more gender-oriented policies and services (Philippine Commission on Women, 2019).

However, despite these expanded political involvements, there has not been a substantial surge in the number of women seeking and securing political positions. Women remain a minority in influencing policy and decision-making as legislators and chief executives at both the national and local levels. The Global Gender Gap Index Report by the World Economic Forum highlighted that the Philippines has made progress in terms of gender equality, with 26% of cabinet ministers being women. Nevertheless, there has been an increase in the disparity between the proportion of male and female parliamentarians, with women comprising only 37.6% of the total. As a result, the overall level of gender equality in political empowerment, measured by the subindex, has decreased by 0.7 percentage points from 2018 to 40.9% (Abad, 2023).

Studies focused on the political participation of women at the national level reveal persistent systemic challenges impeding their access to political seats. These challenges encompass deeply ingrained stereotypes about women and the presence of a patriarchal and oligarchic societal structure (Franco & Laguna, 2023; Aguilar, 1998; Tapales, 2005; Lundgren & Petrosiute, 2017). Research published in 2017 by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) emphasized the ongoing lack of female participation in government throughout the past few decades. The researchers of the study cited above described the overall situation of female participation in municipal elected posts as "particularly alarming" (David, Albert, & Vizmanos, 2017). Moreover, Labone, Parsa, and Querubin (2021) found that term limits, a widely implemented institution in various democracies, led to a significant rise in female participation and success in mayoral elections. Female relatives of the term-limited incumbents entirely propel this increase (Labone, Parsa, & Querubin, 2021).

The study by Baskaran and Hessami (2022) found that female candidates are 4 to 5 percentage points less likely than male candidates to run again conditional on previous candidacy. Studying mechanisms, we find that women are likely held back by incompatibilities between family obligations and political duties as well as a culture of male dominance in local politics.

The findings of the various studies on women's political participation in the Philippines suggest a need to further study the phenomenon of women's political participation at the local level because the current status of women's political leadership does not seem to corroborate the international and national efforts toward women's empowerment. The literature on women's political participation implies a deeper analysis of the socio-political elements that linger in the present political culture of the Philippines, which is key to understanding the scarcity of women's political leaders. To supplement data from previous studies with mixed methods and quantitative designs, the present study looks at the phenomenon of women's political participation at the local level through the lens of a qualitative method. It concentrates

on the phenomenological experiences of select women local leaders to capture their political experiences in terms of their political background, political recruitment, and their perceived factors for winning the elections, under the assumption that local political culture inevitably lays the foundation of the political dynamics at the national level.

Methods
Research Design
This study aimed to gain insights into the experiences of local women politicians (LWPs) through a qualitative research design. Using the phenomenology approach, the primary objective of this research was to understand and articulate the essence of the lived experiences of LWPs, including their political background, political recruitment, and perceived factors for winning elections. The research used interpretative phenomenology; a method grounded in the philosophical perspective of Martin Heidegger. This method emphasizes that understanding and attribution of meaning to lived experiences are essential for grasping phenomena. (Heidegger, 1962; Dowling, 2007; Van Manen, 2007).

According to scholars in interpretative phenomenology, understanding a phenomenon requires developing preliminary assumptions about its inherent meaning. This process involves a circularity known as the hermeneutic circle, which was first explained by Heidegger (1962) and later expanded upon by Willig (2013). The hermeneutic circle refers to a recursive trajectory in the process of making meaning, where comprehension moves cyclically from presupposition to interpretation and back again.

Data Analysis
This study employed the framework proposed by Smith and Osborne (2007) to analyze transcripts from interviews using interpretative phenomenological analysis. This study carried out the analysis in stages, starting with one transcript and then repeating the process for each transcript. Table 1 displays the four crucial stages of the Smith and Osborne IPA. The IPA relies on researchers' interpretations of the

meanings present in the interview data. Researchers accomplished this by assigning appropriate and valid codes to significant lines in the interview transcripts.

This study conducted individual interviews with the LWPs and created a transcript for each interview. The researcher labeled the transcripts with capital letter codes (A to F) corresponding to the pseudonyms assigned to the participants. The transcription process took a minimum of two to three days per interview, involving meticulous verbatim transcription by iteratively playing and pausing the audio recording. We excluded any irrelevant information from the transcripts. To ensure accuracy, two faculty members from the Social Science Department validated each transcript against the corresponding audio recording and made the necessary corrections. Finally, to facilitate data analysis, a line number was assigned to each transcript for easy reference.

Result and Discussion
Profile of Participants
Six local women politicians (LWPs) from the Bukidnon province in the Northern Mindanao Region took part in a study. Following the recommendation by Turpin et al. (1997), the researchers identified these six LWPs as appropriate participants for the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study. Choosing this number allows for a comprehensive exploration of both commonalities and distinctions among individuals while ensuring the manageable collection of qualitative data. All six LWPs provided their informed consent to participate in the research. Of these, five are currently occupying executive or legislative roles, while the sixth LWP previously served as the Bukidnon representative to the Philippine Congress.

The participants' age range is between 25 and 85 years, and all of them hold bachelor's degrees. At least three participants also have professional licenses. The participants' significant political experience is reflected in the duration of their involvement and the diverse array of political positions they have held, encompassing both executive and legislative functions. The marital status of the participants varies, with one currently married, one annulled,

and another a widow, while the remaining two participants are single.

Political Background of LWPs

The political background of the LWPs is similar in five aspects or themes: (1) they were apolitical; (2) young adulthood was their entry point in politics; (3) engagement in philanthropic activities; (4) political family; and (5) extensive political experience. Local women politicians (LWPs) were apolitical before they entered politics. The participants were not politically inclined before they decided to run for a political position. As indicated in Figure 2 on the next page, the majority of the participants consider themselves "apolitical" because they were practicing their profession before running for office. As stated by Participant A:

> *"I was apolitical…because I am a physician…I worked at the hospital, Bukidnon hospital… After staying at the hospital for about seven years, I went [to] private practice…"* (Transcript A, Lines 6-8, 12-14)

Participants B, D, and F were also not politically inclined before they decided to run for an elective position. Politics was not their vocation. The lack of political inclination was because they were working women with professional degrees. This supports the statement of Aguilar (1990) that 75 percent of the local women politicians before they assumed the elective office, were also working women. Female under-representation in politics is due both to a shortage of candidates (supply side) and to a lower appeal of women politicians in elections (demand side) (Cella and Manzoni, 2023).

Before their government election, participants E and C were employed as full-time homemakers. Participant E prioritized her duties as a full-time mother, wife, and businesswoman, which reduced her inclination toward politics (Transcript E, Line 8). Similarly, participant C exhibited apolitical behaviour as she dedicated her time and resources to being a dedicated homemaker and mother.

> *"… I am just a plain housewife. Usually, the places I visit are the market, school, house, and vice-versa. It is because of my children. My husband does not want me to work or be employed. He wanted me to be a plain housewife"* (Transcript B, Line 22).

According to Cella and Manzoni (2023), it has been observed that women often assume the role of primary caretakers for both children and the elderly, resulting in a greater opportunity cost associated with participating in electoral campaigns. However, alternative explanations have been suggested to account for the limited participation of women in politics. Some theories suggest that women may lack confidence and believe they do not possess the necessary qualities to be successful candidates (Fox and Lawless, 2011). On the other hand, Kanthak and Woon (2015) argue that women are willing to represent their group but are averse to elections. Additionally, Fox and Lawless (2014) suggest that women have lower political ambition due to limited political socialization within their families. Lastly, Campbell and Wolbrecht (2006) argue that there is a lack of political role models for women.

Furthermore, the participants decided to enter politics during their young adulthood. The second emergent theme under political background is that the participants were young adults when they decided to enter politics. Four of the participants entered politics in their young adulthood, between the ages of 23 and 35. The youngest participant, Participant D, started her political career at the age of 17 in the Sangguniang Kabataan and is at present one of the youngest municipal councilors in the Province of Bukidnon. Participant D, along with Participant F, started as youth leaders who organized the youth in their local communities. They then sought higher political positions with the encouragement of constituents who saw their potential because of their active involvement with the local youth. This implies that these LWPs started their political engagement or training young. At this early stage, these LWPs were already experiencing the dynamics and processes of political power.

Moreover, while pursuing their careers as young professionals in their respective fields, most of these LWPs who started young actively engaged in community development activities. For instance, Participant A was a medical doctor in the Provincial Hospital and further provided her services to the peripheries of Bukidnon. When she was already in private practice, she would accommodate underprivileged clients who would go to their houses. She would also give her clients a free sample of medicine. In the same way, Participant C was a midwife by profession. She was active in the local church activities as a choir conductor. Because of her affiliation with a local religious congregation, she would join their community development activities, where she would volunteer her services as a midwife.

Being a young professional and a youth leader are common characteristics of LWPs. As Aguilar (1990) and Tapales (2005) noted, women politicians had shown assertiveness, assumed leadership roles during their student days or in the practice of their profession, and engaged in socio-civic work. This includes community development activities such as outreach programs, advocacy work, and volunteer services to those in need.

The involvement of these LWPs in philanthropic activities such as community development is not uncommon for women politicians in the Philippines. This is the third theme under political background. As Participant B explained, her "life revolved around community development" (Transcript B, Lines 60–62), and it was this endeavor that helped her gain the appreciation of the masses. This goes to show that many women politicians were involved in socio-civic activities through which they gained recognition from the residents because of the public service they rendered to the community (Aguilar, 1990; Tapales, 2005).

For example, there is Participant A who would give free medical advice and sample medicines (Transcript A, Lines 199–200) to her clients. Then there is Participant F, who willingly gave her time and resources to constituents who would seek her help:

"..There are times that our constituents visit our house, they asking for help, and sometimes asking for financial help or aid, we usually give our things such as food, rice, and money…" (Transcript F, Line 146).

The same is true for Participant D who grew up in a home where charity is a common value:

"One of the influences I got from my parents is to help other people, especially our constituents, regardless of how small the value is, as long as we help them, they will always remember us of helping them" (Transcript D, Line 133)

In such cases, the female politicians in the area are those who are prepared and eager to contribute their resources and time to charitable endeavors, as well as offer assistance to others (Aguilar, 1990).

The fourth emergent theme is anchored on the lived experiences of the LWPs as members of political families. Most of the LWPs have relatives concurrently holding political positions or have held political positions in the past. They even believe that politics is in their bloodline, as in the case of Participant D. Moreover, these members of the family motivated them to run for office and supported their candidacy financially.

Because the participants were members of political families, they were raised in a political environment where they also took part in the political activities of their family members. When they were young, they were exposed to political discussions on matters related to government and politics. As members of the community, they displayed a strong sense of social consciousness, political awareness, and concern. Participant D explained:

"…at [a] very young age, I was very exposed to politics…I always observed it, because my parents are into local politics including our uncle who is our Mayor…[My involvement into politics] started from my family since I was at a young age…the training was really coming from my family…"
(Transcript D, Line 21, Line 132-134)

These experiences affirm that politics in the Philippines is dominated by powerful political families. As Tapales (2005) noted in her study, women politicians are often married to husbands from an affluent political family.

In other instances, the LWP herself is a member of a prominent political family, as in the case of Participant D, whose male relatives were long-term local politicians, and Participant A, whose brother was a former governor and a member of the House of Representatives. Even participants B, C, and F narrated that they had other family members who were also active in local politics. It implies that the motivation of the LWPs to run was influenced by the politically inclined family members who considered them "replacements" when their political term ended or who exposed them to political activities, hence instilling in them the desire to serve as a public official.

It can be observed that all of the LWPs have extensive political experience, as evidenced by their long years in politics and in holding both legislative and executive positions. The LWPs have spent 5 to 30 years in politics. The participants opted to be re-elected for another political position when their respective terms came to an end, explaining the LWPs' tenure of 5 to 30 years in politics. For instance, the LWPs at the barangay level were "shifting" political positions as Punong Barangay and Barangay Kagawad, respectively. On the other hand, at the municipal or city level, the LWPs opted to seek a higher position, from being a member of the Sangguniang Panlungsod to a Vice Mayor. One even sought a national position as a member of the House of Representatives. In both circumstances, the LWPs were able to retain their political power, albeit in different capacities as the local chief executive and local lawmaker. The result of this is that they were able to retain their power and extend their length of stay, and corollary to this, they widened their political experience as they came to hold another office with a different set of roles and responsibilities.

This theme supports the notions of Aguilar (1990) and Tapales (2005) about how elective positions in the local government are held by a select few individuals or by a political family. The authors argued that political power is circulated among members of political families,

extending their public service beyond the term limits. The community continues to vote for the family members because they have seen the accomplishments of the previous political family member and believe that the same competence is held by the other members of the family (Tapales, 2005).

Analyzing the above-discussed themes for political background, the influence of their powerful political families is very significant. In the beginning, these educated women dedicated their lives to their profession and/or their role as homemakers. They were apolitical, but then were catapulted to political life with the encouragement and support of their politically inclined family members. Though they were not initially politically inclined, they were already accustomed to the life of a political leader as they were already engaged in philanthropic activities, whether it be their voluntary work or the community engagement of their political family members. It is also important to note that, while they initially did not have an interest in politics, once elected, these women held on to power for a long time. In their cycle of re-election, they also enriched their political portfolio by taking on various political positions.

Political Recruitment of LWPs

The entry of LWPs into local politics was mentioned in the discussion of their political background. Focusing on the lived experiences of the LWPs in terms of their political recruitment, there are two major themes: (a) the support of the church and (b) the influence of the political family.

The church supported the candidacy of the majority of the LWPs, as evident from their narration. The support of the church stems from the fact that these LWPs were active in church activities, especially those involving community development. In the case of Participant B, she believes that her entry into politics was a "spiritual grace," hence, she "offers all her political decisions and undertakings to God through prayer and attending the mass" (Transcript B, Line 252, 256). Participant A was also encouraged by a priest to run, especially because, in the beginning, she was not interested in politics

but was actively helping the church reach out to those in need.

The second emergent theme reiterates the result of the political background of the LWP—the influence of the political family. As previously mentioned, the political family not only prepared the LWP for a life in politics but also encouraged and supported their campaign. Moreover, in the experiences of Participants A and D, it is noticeable that their political families supported their candidacy as a means to "continue the legacy" because wala nay lain (there is no one else). As narrated by Participant D:

> *"[In the family], I was the last choice among the family members [to file for candidacy], however one week before the submission of the members to the local party, no member from my immediate family filed a certificate of candidacy [for this district]…that's how I got the family blessing…" (*Transcript D, Line 16)

In addition, Participant A said:

> *"I was not very interested then, but my brother insisted, because they have no other choice."* (Transcript A, Line 57).

This goes to show that the LWPs joined politics because of the responsibility to carry on the political legacy of the family. Political power is cycled among members of the family, while the advocacies and linkages of the clan are continued by women politicians, who are also able to get re-elected to extend their term of public service (Siriban, 2023).

Unlike Participants A and D, the political involvement of Participant E is via another pathway—as a surrogate politician. Henderson and Jeydel (2014) describe women in this path of assuming office as a "replacement" for a father, husband, or brother who has recently died. As previously mentioned, Participant E was the substitute for her husband, who died in an accident. Here, the mechanism of political power in the family being "bequeathed" to a relative can be observed. While Participant E did her fair share of political accomplishments, she

recognized the great impact of the legacy of her deceased husband:

> *"I make it a joke, that when my husband died, I was at the age of 41 back then, I told my constituents that I would never remarry, why? Because my surname will be replaced, I might not be able to win in the next elections".* (Transcript E, Line 24)

Veneracion-Rallonza (2008) explains that in this pathway for women to enter formal politics, the female "chosen one," who is left behind by the husband or any other male political leader, gets the sympathy of the masses. Ultimately, electoral votes transform this sympathy into political power, turning an ordinary woman into a politician herself. For Taylor (2000) describes Participant E's experience as an example of what he refers to as the 'over my dead body' syndrome. This syndrome refers to the phenomenon where widows or daughters of deceased charismatic male leaders have the authority to assume leadership in a political culture characterized by dynastic succession. Participant E, like other politicians' wives who have entered politics, is from a typical aristocratic background and married into a family with a political legacy. Despite not having a political background, she chose to remain in the background and assist her husband in his public service endeavors. She represented the ideal image of a woman shaped by society to embrace her traditional role as a supportive and submissive wife, as well as a caring mother. She even continued to support him by sustaining what her husband had started.

The endorsement of the Church and the influence of the participants' political families affirm that many women entered Philippine politics because of the nation's long history of oligarchy, patriarchy, and the power of the Catholic Church. Based on the narratives of the LWPs, they were very religious and active in church activities. The church saw their potential for political leadership and endorsed their candidacy. The influence of the Church in the political recruitment of women was traced by Vermonte (2014) to how traditional views on women were changed as a result of principles

introduced by the Catholic Church during the Spanish era. When Filipinas in the Spanish era were considered secondary citizens, women like Gabriela Silang made it a point to voice out a change in the system (Vermonte, 2014). This gave birth to the women's movement, as well as ideas of nationalism, citizenship, gender, and democracy. According to Silvestre (2001), endorsements from the church helped boost the candidacy of women in politics. Moreover, female politicians with strong Catholic backgrounds have a positive image in Philippine society (Silvestre, 2001).

Recruitment through the family system is a prevalent method in the Philippines for politicians of both genders (Tapales, 2005; Atienza & Rico, 2006; Vermote, 2014; Lundgren & Petrosiute, 2017). According to Vermonte (2014), there is an absence of a structured recruitment procedure for women seeking to join political parties in the Philippines. Recruitment occurs through the family system, whereby when a husband, father, or brother's term in a public or parliamentary office ends, they may choose to have their wife, daughter, or sister serve as their successor. Veneracion-Rallonza (2008) defines this phenomenon as the utilization of informal authority by women to secure their presence in the realm of politics. Informal politics has historically seen women assuming roles as politicians' spouses, daughters, or sisters, so upholding the family name and political legacy. This typically occurred when the male figure in authority had completed his term of office. According to Veneracion-Rallonza (2008), these women are motivated to seek for public office in order to maintain their families' political influence. However, if a female politician is resolute and holds firm convictions, it signifies that her involvement in politics is not influenced by her husband, brother, or father, but rather stems from her own pursuit of rights and her determination to take a stance (Lundgren & Petrosiute, 2017).

Perceived Factors for Winning

The researcher asked the participants to describe the factors they believed contributed to winning the political polls to gain a better understanding of the LWPs' experiences before their term as political leaders. Out of the lived experiences of the participants, three themes emerged: (a) membership in a political family; (b) philanthropy; and (c) money politics.

LWPs acknowledge the influence of their membership in prominent political families. As previously discussed, the politically inclined members of the family motivated the LWP to join politics. The victory at the polls of the LWPs was often influenced by the support of the family network, as reflected in the political party machinery dominated by the influential political family. The linkages of the political family serve as the network of the LWP, and they benefit from the good faith of the community in the legacy of their family.

Participant D mentioned that winning the votes is not that difficult because most people vote for the candidates endorsed by the incumbent administration:

> *"I did not expect the be the first in rank in the last elections. But what I observed in our municipality is that whoever is endorsed and on the same ticket by the mayor (my uncle), that candidate will be voted by the people… Our mayor (my uncle) has been very influential to the people in our municipality…"* (Transcript D, Line 34-38, 139-141).

The family of the LWP was already involved in socio-civic activities, for which they had gained recognition from the residents. The LWPs perceived these philanthropic activities as a contributing factor to their success in the election polls. The recognition generated by these socio-civic works was also attached to the LWP, who was a prominent member of the aforementioned philanthropic political family. Not only was the political family active in socio-civic activities, but more importantly, the poorer members of the community also ran to their political family for assistance when they were in need or when there was an emergency. As Participant A shared:

> *"Yes, [I give them] medicine. That is why, the Vice Mayor who lost in the previous election, said: "I already started my campaign, even before the campaign period started". My patients were already*

part of my campaign. I was just being a friend to them and then, I felt really bad for the majority of the farmers who are also voters, because they came from far-flung villages, but they arrived at our house around 9 in the morning, but they arrived late, it still accommodates them. That is why my opponents would tell me that I already started my campaign way before the election period starts. But for me, it was never an early campaign, but a public service". (Transcript A, Lines 202-213).

Participant B further shared:

"Yes, I worked [as a midwife] in our village, but I treat that as my outreach activity because every time I practice my profession as a midwife, I do not ask for compensation. I felt that I was already involved in community activities, and it was the people in the community who encouraged me to be a candidate in the local elections, which is why I did not experience any loss in all my election experience".(Transcript B, Lines 31-35)

Indeed, these acts of public service, even before their bid for a political position, were perceived by the participants as an important component in their success in the polls.

The third emergent theme for perceived factors in winning is money politics. Money politics is the distribution of money, goods, and other benefits as an integral part of electioneering (Tapales, 2005). In the Philippines, this common practice is known as "vote buying." Participant F honestly admitted that vote-buying is an essential component if one wishes to succeed in the polls.

"...I realized that one cannot succeed in the election if the candidate has no money. I will not be ashamed to say that, because I used my own money. I gave money to my constituents, [e.g village captains], I am not ashamed of that, because I wanted to serve the public. I wanted to work and act as their leader" (Transcript F Line 63)

Participant A explained that LWPs from affluent political families can easily fund the electoral campaign of a family member. As Participant A explained:

"Everybody contributed [some amount of money] because in our family, I am the poorest, so I have the least to spend. So, all of them contributed." (Transcript A, Line 188-189)

Parallel to the findings in the political background and political recruitment of the LWPs, the membership of these LWPs in prominent political families has a huge impact on their success at the polls.

Putting together the emergent themes in the political background, political recruitment, and perceived factors of winning in the lived experiences of the LWPs, the phenomenon of kinship politics is apparent in the political history of the LWPs.

The lived experiences of the LWPs validate earlier findings on how "kinship politics" in the Philippines accommodated the entry and increase of women in politics. Kinship politics deals with how political power is bequeathed, inherited, and "cycled" in a prominent political clan (Siriban, 2023; Tapales, 2005; Lundgren & Petrosiute, 2017; Roces, 2000). It dictates that women function as a support system for male politicians (Roces, 2000). Therefore, the conventional role of women as spouses, offspring, and siblings has served as the foundation for exercising authority and strengthening the political influence of the family. Fielding a female clan member can be a strategy to maintain the political clan's hold of a position in response to institutional constraints, including rules that prevent an individual from permanently holding an elective position (Siriban, 2023).

Based on the previously discussed emergent themes, the LWPs were initially apolitical and uninterested in politics, but in actuality, they were actually "prepared" for the political tasks they had taken on under their membership and upbringing in a political family. For example, the behind-the-scenes actions of spouses and daughters have a direct impact on the actors and institutions of formal politics (Veneracion-Rallonza, 2008). As the female kin

of male politicians, these women also engage in political activities like fund-raising, charity work, and disbursement of funds to aid constituents in times of great necessity. By doing so, these women not only project the image of a caring leader to their male kin, but they also have a foretaste of public service and are inadvertently introduced to the community as well. By election time, the commitment of wives, daughters, and sisters during the campaign helps woo the voters toward the male politician (Veneracion-Rallonza, 2008). Furthermore, nearly all of the activities carried out by the LWPs prior to their official election to office can be classified as political activity, with the exception of enacting genuine law (Veneracion-Rallonza, 2008). Similarly, charitable endeavors might be seen as political endeavors, given that a significant number of the individuals involved in these activities come from political backgrounds. Therefore, even if they were not involved in politics, it would be simplistic to label them as political novices (Veneracion-Rallonza, 2008).

In terms of their political recruitment, the themes also validate the findings of studies that emphasized how "family political experience seems to be the main factor [in making] Filipino women who, while aware of their influence from the sidelines, transcend the covert area of politics...to the overt political domain of elections" (Hega, 2003; Tapales, 2005; Aguilar, 2000). Veneracion-Rallonza (2008) described a phenomenon of "women benchwarmers". Due to term limits imposed on public officials, the male figure is compelled to transfer his political career to a female family member. Typically, after a male's tenure of office concludes, he will seek candidacy for another position, while his wife, daughter, or sister will vie for the position he has left vacant. These women have the ability to leverage their traditional roles as wife, daughters, or sisters to influence the public's perception of the political family. They can showcase the close bond and support within a typical Filipino family, while also demonstrating the leadership qualities seen in more prominent and active political members.

Underlying the immense influence of kinship politics are political elitism and money

politics. As Sidel (1997) noted, local economically elite families who own sizeable lands can dispense funds needed for campaigns and can also engineer the entry of their scions into government. Therefore, these women possess the resources to fund an election campaign and benefit from the established network of their family members to support their candidacy.

Without downplaying the extent of achievement and accomplishment of LWPs, their political history is a manifestation of the fact that women are elected into public office, not because they are women but because they are members of political families who can provide a venue to perpetuate power in the current and succeeding generations. Additionally, they originate from the affluent social groups. The established upper class and conventional politicians derive their power from owning land, whereas the emerging elite acquire wealth through diverse entrepreneurial and business endeavors. Consequently, they have the means to finance their political aspirations through the practice of patronage politics (Veneracion-Rallonza, 2008). Patronage can be derived either from a wide-ranging family network or by establishing connections with individuals who are perceived to hold political influence. Women politicians, particularly those who originate from informal power, adhere to the same pattern of continuously maintaining their position of authority.

Political dynasties are not necessarily dysfunctional. However, elected female officials' heavy reliance on and loyalty to family may have detrimental effects (Valente and Moreno, 2014; Vermonte, 2014; Lundgren & Petrosiute, 2017; Labonne, Parsa, & Querubin, 2017). When women gain entry into political office through their affiliation with their families, political parties, or other interest groups, they may prioritize representing the specific interests of those affiliations rather than the broader interests of women as a whole. Likewise, their capacity to implement policies that benefit women may be limited, even if they have the desire to do so, due to the continued influence of other family members or influential members within their political party (Labonne, Parsa, & Querubin, 2017).

If political empowerment is then a priority for nation-building, a local indicator should include policies addressing the issue of political power concentrated on local prominent political clans. Such an endeavor would pave the way to accommodate women who have the necessary capabilities for good governance, even if they are not members of political families.

Conclusion

The present study explored the lived political experiences of local women politicians (LWPs) in the province of Bukidnon. The LWPs' political experience comprised their political background, political recruitment, and perceived factors for winning the elections. The participants of the study were six LWPs who were occupying or were previously occupying executive and legislative elected seats in the province. The Smith and Osborne (2007) model of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used as the research method to dissect the narratives of the LWPs and generate their lived experiences through a table of themes. Kinship politics is the pathway for women to ent (Taylor, 2000)er politics. At the start, LWPs were apolitical because they were pursuing their careers or were full-time homemakers. Yet they were not political neophytes because most of them were already "raised" to become politicians because of their exposure to political and civic activities done in their political clans. The family-oriented political culture of the Philippines (kinship politics) influences women's progress in achieving powerful government positions. Evidence from this study supports the literature that most of the women who enter politics come from prominent political families. This means that access to political power is limited to women who are members of powerful political families who have the resources to support their candidacy and the necessary guidance for these women, who were initially apolitical. They were also actively involved in community development, preparing them for a life of public service or exposure to politics because of their political family. Their recruitment to politics was through typical channels: the church and the political family. Women tend to be benchwarmers and/or surrogates for the men in their family to continue the political legacy of the family. Furthermore, their membership in political clans helped increase their chances of winning in the polls because of the established network and election machinery of their political clan.

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