THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS ON GENDER DIVERSITY IN LEADERSHIP: A GOVERNANCE PERSPECTIVE IN SAUDI PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

Gender diversity in leadership is a crucial worldwide problem, especially inside Saudi public institutions, where cultural and organizational variables profoundly influence women's leadership prospects. This research analyzes the impact of cultural norms, leadership styles, and governance frameworks on gender diversity in leadership positions. Data were gathered from 138 participants in Saudi public organizations using a standardized survey. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression models were used to evaluate the link among cultural views, leadership practices, and gender discrepancies. Research demonstrates that cultural attitudes and leadership styles significantly affect gender representation in leadership, with conventional male-dominated frameworks obstructing women's professional advancement. The findings underscore a significant association between gender diversity and leadership efficacy, highlighting the need for inclusive governance measures. This research advances the discourse on gender equality in leadership and offers ideas for promoting gender-inclusive leadership in Saudi public institutions. The subsequent study needs to investigate gender-specific difficulties within various sectors and assess the enduring effects of policy improvements.

Keywords: Gender Diversity, Leadership Styles, Cultural Norms, Organizational Barriers, Saudi Public Organizations

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender diversity in leadership has emerged as a significant worldwide concern, with businesses endeavoring to cultivate inclusive workplaces that provide equitable opportunities for both men and women to succeed. Nonetheless, despite considerable advancements in fostering gender

equality via governmental programs and business regulations, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership roles throughout several locations, including Saudi Arabia (Syed et al., 2018; Alhassan & Al Doghan, 2022). The Kingdom's Vision 2030, a strategic framework for economic and social transformation, emphasizes female empowerment as a critical objective; nonetheless, cultural and organizational obstacles persist in hindering women's advancement to senior positions (Abadi et al., 2022). Despite legal advancements aimed at promoting gender inclusion, workplace dynamics often mirror deeply rooted cultural conventions and conventional gender roles, restricting women's access to leadership positions (Hodges, 2017; Alsharif, 2018).

A significant concern in this context is the disparity between corporate policies advocating gender equality and the enduring prejudices that obstruct women's professional progression. Studies demonstrate that leadership styles and behaviors significantly affect leadership effectiveness (McCleskey, 2014); yet there is a paucity of research on how these dynamics contribute to gender discrepancies in leadership roles within Saudi governmental organizations. Current research indicates that male leaders are frequently linked to transactional leadership styles, which prioritize control and rewards, whereas female leaders are more inclined to embrace transformational leadership methods that highlight collaboration, empowerment, and inclusive decision-making (Al-Shamrani, 2013). In Saudi Arabia, the efficacy of leadership, especially in public enterprises, is often influenced by hierarchical frameworks and culturally entrenched expectations, which predominantly endorse male-centric leadership models (Sian et al., 2020; Hodges, 2017). Cultural beliefs about women's leadership attributes, risk tolerance, and decision-making authority persistently influence the perception and treatment of female leaders in the workplace (Guy et al., 2008; Abalkhail, 2017).

This research seeks to examine the influence of cultural and societal factors on gender diversity in leadership roles, assess the contribution of leadership styles and behaviors to gender disparities in leadership, investigate the challenges women encounter in obtaining leadership positions within Saudi public organizations, and offer recommendations for fostering gender-inclusive leadership and enhancing organizational structures (Almalki et al., 2024). This research will provide significant insights into the current discussion on gender diversity in leadership by examining the following critical research questions:

RQ1: How do cultural and organizational factors affect gender diversity in leadership?

RQ2: Which leadership styles facilitate or obstruct gender inclusivity?

RQ3: What obstacles do women encounter in attaining leadership positions?

RQ4: How can governance frameworks be improved to promote inclusivity?

This study enhances the discourse on gender diversity in leadership, specifically examining the governance framework in Saudi Arabia, by investigating the impact of cultural and organizational variables on women's leadership chances. Comprehending these processes is crucial for formulating effective strategies that may tackle the gender discrepancy in leadership positions

(Husu et al., 2010). This study's findings will provide practical insights for policymakers, corporate executives, and human resource professionals aiming to improve gender diversity in leadership roles and align with Saudi Arabia's national transformation goals, thereby fostering inclusive governance and sustainable organizational growth (Al-Dajani & Alsahli, 2021; Riddle & Ayyagari, 2011).

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the literature on gender diversity in leadership. Section 3 explains the research methodology. Section 4 presents the results. Section 5 discusses the findings, and Section 6 concludes with key insights and recommendations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the existing literature on gender diversity in leadership, focusing on the cultural, organizational, and societal factors that shape women's access to leadership roles, particularly within the context of Saudi public organizations.

The role of culture in shaping gender diversity in leadership has been extensively studied, with research highlighting how cultural values, norms, and societal expectations impact women's opportunities and experiences in leadership positions. The experiences and access of women in leadership are significantly shaped by cultural ideas. van Emmerik et al. (2008) assert that individualistic cultures foster gender-inclusive leadership, while collectivist civilizations limit opportunities for women's leadership. Abadi et al. (2022) demonstrated that patriarchal institutions in the Middle East impede women's advancement in leadership due to prevailing social and institutional norms. Hodges (2017) investigated Saudi Arabia, where gender norms obstruct women's leadership. Guy et al. (2008) examined the influence of cultural norms on the emotional labor of women leaders in public service. Jamjoom and Mills (2022) analyzed how Saudi women leaders reinterpret their leadership experiences to surmount cultural constraints. Qureshi et al. (2011) investigated the influence of cultural norms in higher education and management on women's leadership, whereas Sian et al. (2020) analyzed the impediments to women's leadership in Saudi Arabia's audit organizations stemming from gender, politics, and religion.

Gender diversity, leadership style, and cultural variables influence leadership behaviors, and Alhassan and Al Doghan (2022) discovered that cultural expectations influence women's leadership opportunities. According to Chin (2013), leaders from various races, genders, and minority backgrounds are shaped by cultural norms pertaining to diversity. Syed et al. (2018) investigated gender equality in Saudi Arabia and found that cultural beliefs in the workplace hinder women's leadership potential. Abalkhail (2017) investigated the impact of societal and institutional constraints on Saudi women's aspirations and experiences in leadership within higher education. Khan and Varshney (2013) investigated transformational leadership in Saudi Arabia, acknowledging that cultural norms may impede women while also enabling them to lead in distinct ways. Aladwey and Alsudays (2023) discovered that the cultural context affects corporate governance in Saudi Arabia, specifically regarding board gender

diversity and corporate value. Abu Alsuood and Youde (2018) discovered that cultural norms significantly influence leadership practices among deans in Saudi universities. Hodges (2017) analyzed the entrenched cultural perspectives that hinder Saudi women from attaining leadership positions.

Research indicates that organizational barriers restrict Saudi women's opportunities for leadership in public institutions. Alsubaie and Jones (2017) investigated cultural and structural barriers to women's leadership in Saudi higher education. Abdelwahed et al. (2022) investigated Saudi women's entrepreneurship and identified that cultural norms and organizational frameworks impede women's leadership, particularly in both public and private sectors. Ely and Rhode (2010) emphasized societal and organizational prejudices against women's leadership capabilities. Hogan and Coote (2014) assessed Schein's notion of organizational culture and determined that male-dominated leadership paradigms impede women's advancement in leadership roles, particularly in traditional Saudi Arabia. Hoyt and Simon (2024) observed that social psychological factors and gender biases exclude women from leadership positions, exacerbating organizational gender disparities. Lewis and Fagenson-Eland (1998) discovered that gender and organizational hierarchy influence perceptions of leadership conduct, with women seen as less competent at elevated levels. Rincón et al. (2017) assert that in Saudi state businesses, organizational frameworks that prioritize male leadership provide significant gender obstacles to attaining senior management positions.

Almalki et al. (2024) examined the healthcare education sector in Saudi Arabia and identified that cultural expectations and organizational structures impede women's leadership, particularly in education. Parveen (2023) analyzed structural barriers to Saudi women's leadership, such as limited access to decision-making roles and the cultural perception of leadership as a male-dominated domain. Al-Ahmadi (2011) analyzed the social, cultural, and institutional barriers to women's leadership in Saudi Arabia. Otayf (2024) investigated the subjective experiences of women leaders at Saudi government universities and found that gender biases and institutional support impede leadership. Al-Asfour et al. (2017) assessed the impediments to Saudi women's employment, including cultural norms and organizational practices that obstruct their professional advancement in both the public and private sectors. Alfarran et al. (2018) observed that gender-specific limitations and insufficient leadership development support impede the career opportunities of Saudi women. Alomair (2015) conducted a critical analysis of the literature about female leadership in higher education, revealing that Saudi women face institutional barriers, including inadequate mentorship and societal expectations, which restrict their leadership capabilities. Alzaaqi et al. (2025) investigated empowerment strategies within the Saudi health sector, identifying gender biases, inadequate leadership training, and insufficient governmental initiatives to support the advancement of women's leadership.

In addition to external barriers, gender diversity in leadership styles also influence how women are perceived and evaluated in leadership roles, with studies suggesting that women's transformational leadership styles may be more effective in certain organizational contexts. Research indicates that male and female leaders differ in their leadership styles and effectiveness. Al-Shamrani (2013) discovered in Saudi Arabia that women in segregated workplaces exhibit more collaboration and transformative leadership, whilst males display more authoritarian or transactional styles. Angelakis et al. (2024) investigated crisis communication within German higher education and found that female leaders exhibited more empathy and sentimentality in online interactions compared to their male counterparts, underscoring gender disparities in communication styles. Eklund et al. (2017) investigated leadership across several contexts and found that women generally exhibit more democratic and participative styles compared to men, who favor hierarchical and directive approaches. Górska (2016) posits that women are seen as more emotional and relationship-oriented, whilst men are regarded as more task-focused and directive, influencing leadership efficacy. Maher (1997) demonstrated that leadership stereotypes perpetuate gendered expectations of leadership success by linking women to transformational capabilities and men to transactional ones. McCleskey (2014) observed that situational, transformational, and transactional leadership styles may be beneficial in different contexts; nevertheless, gender may influence the selected style without affecting leadership efficacy.

Sabharwal et al. (2017) showed that the leadership styles of Master of Public Administration (MPA) directors are influenced by gender, with women favoring collaborative and transformational approaches, while men go toward authoritarian forms. Jrasat and Zubaidi (2024) investigated Saudi women in healthcare, revealing that cultural norms and organizational frameworks impede their leadership performance; nevertheless, they also observed that female leaders exhibit more empathy and support than their male counterparts. Sobaih and Abu Elnasr (2024) analyzed the Saudi tourist sector and the obstacles women have in overcoming the glass barrier. Research indicates that women's leadership styles in this industry are more inclusive and relationship-focused; nonetheless, they encounter considerable gender-based career obstacles. Dahlan (2024) examined leadership development in Saudi higher education institutions, noting that although women leaders often use collaborative and transformational strategies, gender biases impede succession planning and professional advancement. Ur Rehman and Alorifi (2024) discovered that Saudi women entrepreneurs choose transformational leadership, which prioritizes innovation and change; nevertheless, societal expectations and gender biases impede their leadership capabilities. Aldekhyyel et al. (2024) investigated Saudi women's perspectives on healthcare leadership and discovered a preference for participatory leadership styles, which align with the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030's health reform; nonetheless, they continue to face challenges in the male-dominated healthcare industry. Addin (2025) examined women's participation in the arbitration of administrative contract disputes and how gender disparities hinder women's leadership across several domains, obstructing their professional advancement.

The impact of governance frameworks and policies on gender diversity in leadership is particularly relevant in the Saudi context, where national initiatives and institutional policies are designed to promote gender equality but still face significant cultural resistance. Abdallah (2024) investigated the influence of gender, cultural, and psychological factors on the formation of leadership in distance education, concluding that these components shape women's leadership styles and opportunities within the educational sphere. Alshammari et al. (2020) discovered that Saudi nursing leaders use emotional intelligence and genuine leadership; yet, organizational regulations and gender roles impose constraints on them. Groves and LaRocca (2011) investigated ethical leadership in business, revealing that ethical principles and leadership styles, such as transformational and transactional leadership, influence corporate governance, but gender prejudices impede women's ascension to leadership roles. van Emmerik et al. (2008) examined global leadership practices and discovered that cultural and gender factors influence leadership efficacy, with Saudi Arabia's cultural norms promoting gender diversity in leadership positions. Husu et al. (2010) examined the reinforcement of gendered leadership stereotypes by organizational policies and the divergent perceptions of leadership held by men and women. Pick (2024) analyzed the impact of governance structures and regulations on women's access to power and leadership roles across many sectors, including the Middle East. Riddle and Ayyagari (2011) analyzed the corporate ethics of female Egyptian managers, which may be relevant to Saudi Arabia, where cultural norms and organizational limitations provide similar gendered leadership challenges.

Despite advancements in organizational policies and diversity management in Saudi Arabia, Abaker et al. (2019) identified that gender-specific regulations and practices continue to hinder women's attainment of leadership roles. Alhejji et al. (2018) investigated gender equality methods at a British multinational corporation in Saudi Arabia and found that formal policies and informal cultural norms influence gender equality, with informal distance often perpetuating gender disparities. Arayssi (2020) examined Saudi Arabia's socioeconomic advancement, its Gender Inequality Index, and recommendations for improving gender equality in leadership, notwithstanding traditional gender roles. Alshareef and Sandhu (2015) integrated corporate social responsibility into corporate governance, demonstrating that board diversity, particularly in gender, enhances governance and social responsibility within Saudi firms. In Gulf Cooperation Council countries such as Saudi Arabia, board gender diversity is positively correlated with corporate social engagement; yet, cultural norms hinder gender equality in leadership roles. Issa and Fang (2019) discovered that gender diversity on corporate boards enhances corporate social responsibility in Arab Gulf countries. Chebbi and Ammer (2022) discovered that in Saudi Arabia, board composition and governance structures may enhance environmental, social, and governance disclosures, with gender diversity serving as a moderating factor. Doumato (1992) analyzed the impact of the Saudi Arabian monarchy's policies on women's roles in public and leadership positions.

Eichenauer and Ryan (2024) discovered that incongruent gender leadership expectations resulted in women being evaluated more critically than men. Women's activities are often seen as less effective than men's, which impedes their leadership development. Itzkovitch-Malka (2024) discovered that gendered expectations for leadership positions intensify during crises, with women often facing scrutiny and skepticism regarding their leadership capabilities. A meta-analysis conducted by Badura et al. (2018) showed that gender-based biases associating leadership qualities with masculinity diminish the likelihood of women assuming leadership roles in competitive environments. Tremmel and Wahl (2023) discovered that male leaders exhibit decisiveness and assertiveness, whereas female leaders have caring qualities but possess inferior decision-making skills, hence limiting their leadership opportunities. The 2024 song juxtaposes civilizations' ideals toward gender equality with the advancement of women's leadership, illustrating that certain cultures impose more pronounced gender standards than others.

Alqahtani (2021) investigated the challenges faced by women in leadership within Saudi higher education, highlighting cultural norms and institutional barriers that limit their opportunities. Alsharif (2018) identified organizational barriers and gendered expectations that hinder women's ascension to leadership positions at Saudi public universities. Alwazzan and Rees (2016) investigated the medical education of Saudi women and found that gendered biases, including perceptions of diminished capability in leadership roles, impede their professional progression. Bakr (2022) investigated the empowerment of Saudi women in academic leadership roles and discovered that cultural norms and biases around gender roles in education continue to obstruct women's leadership. Thelma and Ngulube (2024) observed that institutional and cultural biases, particularly the belief that women are unsuitable for leadership, impede the global advancement of women's leadership. Tabassum and Nayak (2021) demonstrated that leadership style preconceptions, which link leadership qualities to masculinity, hinder women's opportunities for leadership from a management perspective. Setyaningrum and Juansih (2024) compiled data on gender-related challenges in women's leadership careers, including gender biases, cultural expectations, and insufficient mentorship as obstacles to women's leadership.

To tackle these difficulties, research promotes gender-inclusive leadership models and organizational changes that provide equitable opportunity for women, especially in public sector leadership positions, which have historically been male-dominated. Ehrhart and Klein (2001) investigated charismatic leadership and the influence of followers' ideas and personalities on their decisions, emphasizing the need for inclusive leadership in fostering diverse leadership styles. Burke and Collins (2001) examined gender diversity in leadership styles and managerial competencies, advocating for organizations to prioritize both masculine and feminine leadership qualities to enhance diversity and inclusion. Itzkovitch-Malka (2024) investigated the evolution of gender biases related to leadership positions during crises, highlighting the need for strategies to eradicate these prejudices and facilitate effective leadership

for both men and women. Gooty et al. (2023) called for gender-inclusive leadership in business schools to provide fair opportunities for women to attain leadership positions. Najmaei (2018) analyzed the strategic leadership paradigm and promoted gender-inclusive leadership methodologies to foster an equitable workplace culture. Billah and Kabir (2024) emphasized the need for inclusive governance frameworks that enable women in leadership roles to improve the public sector in Bangladesh. Purwaningtias and Purba (2025) discovered that gender influences inclusive leadership behaviors that challenge corporate norms for the benefit of society. Kamalizeni et al. (2018) analyzed the underrepresentation of women in public enterprises in Swaziland and suggested gender-inclusive organizational strategies to enhance women's leadership. Akbar et al. (2023) assessed women's leadership within Saudi Arabia's higher education sector and emphasized the requirement for leadership development programs in mostly male academic institutions.

Chung and Grichting Solder (2024) proposed the use of European concepts to develop gender-inclusive urban environments in the Arabian Gulf, aimed at advancing female equality in public space governance. Aldossari and Calvard (2022) analyzed the dynamics of resistance and feminism inside Saudi Arabian institutions and championed female equality in leadership roles. According to Chalermchaikit et al. (2024), inclusion in human resource management may improve female participation in leadership within industries such as hospitality. Alshdiefat et al. (2024) advocated for legislative and organizational reforms to remove barriers to women's leadership in Jordanian colleges. Proff and Musalam (2024) emphasized the importance of supportive networks and mentorship in addressing the obstacles of educational leadership for women. Al-Dajani and Alsahli (2021) assessed the challenges faced by Saudi women entrepreneurs and recommended institutional enhancements to facilitate women's leadership in the entrepreneurial domain. Ottmann (2024) emphasized the need for gender-inclusive leadership in the architecture, engineering and construction sectors to achieve long-term social and environmental goals and sustainable urban development. Xu et al. (2024) discovered that gender-inclusive leadership techniques might promote public sector expansion and societal progress. Al-Lamky (2007) articulated the perspectives of Omani female leaders about the feminization of Arab leadership to cultivate more inclusive and effective systems.

The current research emphasizes the influence of cultural and organizational determinants on gender diversity in leadership; nevertheless, there is a notable deficiency in comprehending how these elements precisely interact within Saudi public institutions. Prior research has examined the impact of cultural norms and societal expectations, including patriarchal frameworks (Abadi et al., 2022) and conventional gender roles (Hodges, 2017), on the restriction of women's leadership opportunities; however, there is a lack of emphasis on how these factors influence leadership styles and efficacy within public organizations. Despite the extensive documentation of gender disparities in leadership styles, wherein women frequently employ more transformational and collaborative methods

(Al-Shamrani, 2013), the precise influence of these disparities on leadership efficacy within Saudi public sectors, particularly in male-dominated domains such as healthcare and academia, remains inadequately examined (Alwazzan & Rees, 2016; Jrasat & Zubaidi, 2024). Moreover, while research has identified organizational obstacles, including gendered policies and prejudices (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Al-Ahmadi, 2011), there is little investigation into how these barriers explicitly combine with cultural expectations to influence women's advancement in leadership roles. The need for gender-inclusive leadership (Gooty et al., 2023) and governance changes (Kamalizeni et al., 2018) is widespread, although practical methods specific to the Saudi context are few. This study seeks to address these deficiencies by analyzing the cultural and organizational determinants that affect gender diversity in leadership across Saudi public institutions and offering specific suggestions to promote a more inclusive leadership framework.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes qualitative research methods to thoroughly investigate the impact of cultural and organizational variables on gender diversity in leadership positions within Saudi public organizations. The technique incorporates descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis to provide a comprehensive assessment of the correlations among important factors, such as cultural influences, gender disparities, and leadership behaviors (McCleskey, 2014).

3.1. Research design

A descriptive research approach is used, enabling a comprehensive analysis of gender diversity in leadership across Saudi public institutions. This methodology is appropriate for gathering both qualitative and quantitative data, allowing a thorough study of the elements leading to gender discrepancies in leadership positions (Groves & LaRocca, 2011). Descriptive statistics capture essential features of the sample, while correlation and regression analysis evaluate linkages and predicted variables affecting gender diversity in leadership (Ely & Rhode, 2010; Alsubaie & Jones, 2017).

3.2. Participants and sampling

The research included 150 participants from several Saudi public institutions, all occupying leadership roles at various hierarchical tiers. The sample includes people from first-level, middle, senior, and top management, guaranteeing comprehensive coverage of leadership experiences. To mitigate bias, random stratified sampling was used, guaranteeing a proportional representation of respondents from various management tiers (Lewis & Fagenson-Eland, 1998; Rincón et al., 2017). This method guarantees the research encompasses a wide array of viewpoints from sectors like healthcare, education, and public administration (Almalki et al., 2024).

A total of 138 valid answers were obtained, resulting in a 92% response rate, deemed sufficient for statistical analysis (Abaker et al., 2019). The gender distribution of participants indicates 66.7% male and 28.3% female, highlighting significant gender discrepancies in leadership

positions in Saudi Arabia (Hodges, 2017; Sian et al., 2020). Furthermore, 37.7% of participants were from mid-level management, while 32.6% were from middle management, suggesting the presence of career advancement obstacles at these tiers, especially for women (Alqahtani, 2021; Alsharif, 2018).

3.3. Data collection

Data were collected by an online questionnaire disseminated via professional networks, institutional emails, and social media platforms (Jizi et al., 2022). The questionnaire included explicit instructions, an opening statement detailing the study's aims, and Likert scale questions assessing cultural views, leadership styles, gender attitudes, and leadership experiences (Al-Shamrani, 2013). The Likert scale spanned from "strongly agree" (5) to "strongly disagree" (0), providing a consistent method for assessing respondents' opinions toward leadership and gender diversity (Alhejji et al., 2018).

The questionnaire included demographic inquiries on gender, age, job title, years of experience, and employment sector, allowing a comprehensive knowledge of participant profiles and their significance to leadership diversity (Abalkhail, 2017; Abu Alsuood & Youde, 2018).

3.4. Data analysis

Quantitative data were examined by descriptive statistics to evaluate the mean and standard deviation (SD) of major variables, including respondents' perspectives on leadership and gender diversity (Song, 2024). Correlation analysis was used to discern links among cultural influences, leadership practices, and gender inequalities, facilitating the evaluation of the relevance of cultural and organizational elements in determining leadership chances for women (Aladwey & Alsudays, 2023; Syed et al., 2018).

A regression analysis was conducted to examine how leadership dimensions and cultural perceptions predict gender disparities in leadership positions. The regression model is presented by the independent and dependent variables.

Independent variables (predictors):
• culture shapes beliefs and perceptions about leadership and gender roles;
• interpersonal leadership skills and their impact on leadership effectiveness;
• leadership style (transformational vs. transactional);
• leadership behavior, including decision-making, empowerment, and communication.

Dependent variable:
• gender diversity in leadership positions (assessed through representation, career progression, and leadership effectiveness).

The regression model was tested for significance (analysis of variance (ANOVA) test: F-statistic = 8.698, $p < 0.001$), confirming that cultural and leadership variables significantly predict gender disparities in leadership roles (Groves & LaRocca, 2011; Riddle & Ayyagari, 2011).

3.5. Reliability and validity

Cronbach's alpha test was used to assess the reliability and validity of the survey instrument, evaluating internal consistency[1]. The test yielded an alpha value of 0.8, indicating robust dependability since values beyond 0.7 are deemed appropriate for research projects (Abaker et al., 2019). A pilot study was done to develop survey questions, ensuring clarity in phrasing and structure in alignment with research goals (Alomair, 2015; Alzaaqi et al., 2025).

3.6. Alternative research methods

While the mixed-methods approach provides a balanced analysis, alternative methodologies could have been considered. Ethnographic research could have provided deeper qualitative insights into how cultural norms impact leadership interactions (Husu et al., 2010). Longitudinal studies tracking gender diversity over time could offer insights into evolving leadership dynamics and policy effectiveness (Pick, 2024). Furthermore, in-depth qualitative interviews with Saudi women leaders could supplement the quantitative findings with richer, personal experiences (Bakr, 2022).

3.7. Ethical considerations

This study complies with rigorous ethical standards, guaranteeing informed consent, data confidentiality, and voluntary participation (Chalermchaikit et al., 2024). Participants were apprised of the study's objective, and data confidentiality was maintained throughout the research procedure. Furthermore, bias mitigation strategies were used in the survey design and data collection to reduce researcher-induced effects (Alhejji et al., 2018).

4. RESULTS

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents, which provides significant insights into the composition of the sample. In terms of age, the majority of respondents fall within the 26–30 years old range, accounting for 31.9% of the total, followed by 31–35 years old with 27.5%, and 36+ years old at 24.7%. The smallest group is the 21–25 years old age group, representing 15.9% of the respondents. This indicates that the sample is largely composed of younger to mid-career professionals. Regarding seniority, 37.7% of respondents occupy mid-level positions, while 32.6% hold middle-management roles. The first-level management category comprises 15.9% and senior management makes up 13.8%, suggesting a higher concentration of middle-tier leadership within the sample. In terms of gender, the study shows a notable imbalance, with 66.7% male and 28.3% female respondents, highlighting a predominance of male leaders in the sample. When considering work experience, 29% of respondents have less than 5 years of experience, while 26.1% have 5–10 years, 24.3% have 11–15 years, and 20.6% have 16+ years. This distribution indicates that the sample is relatively young, with many respondents still early in their careers. Educationally, the majority of

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[1] https://stats.oarc.ucla.edu/spss/faq/what-does-cronbachs-alpha-mean/

respondents hold a Bachelor's degree (54.3%), while 29% have a Master's degree and 16.7% hold a Doctoral degree, reflecting a well-educated sample. As for the organizational sector, 55.8% of the respondents work in the private sector, while 28.3% are in the public sector, suggesting that private organizations are more heavily represented. Finally, the respondents are predominantly from the Eastern region, with 79.7% of the sample residing there, indicating a regional concentration that may influence leadership perceptions and practices. This demographic distribution helps to contextualize the findings of the research, particularly regarding gender diversity, leadership styles, and organizational dynamics in Saudi public organizations.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics (mean and SD) for various gender diversity and leadership variables, reflecting respondents' views on how cultural influences, gender diversity, and leadership styles impact women's leadership roles. The mean scores provide insight into the central tendency of responses, while the SD reflect the variation in those responses.

Table 1. Demographic variables of respondents

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Age group	21–25 years old	15.9
	26–30 years old	31.9
	31–35 years old	27.5
	36+ years old	24.7
Seniority position	First-level	15.9
	Mid-level	37.7
	Middle	32.6
	Senior	13.8
Organizational sector	Private	55.8
	Public	28.3
Gender	Male	66.7
	Female	28.3
Work experience	< 5 years	29
	5–10 years	26.1
	11–15 years	24.3
	16+ years	20.6
Education level	Bachelor's degree	54.3
	Master's degree	29
	Doctoral degree	16.7
Living region	Eastern	79.7

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for gender diversity and leadership variables: Mean and standard deviation

Variable	Mean	SD
Cultural influences impacting gender diversity	3.5	1.05
Opportunities for women leaders in the workplace are proportionally affected by cultural influences	3.6	1.05
Women leaders have developed overall leadership competencies in different sectors	3.4	1.0
Culture shapes beliefs and perceptions about leadership	3.3	0.9
Culture and experience of women's leadership roles affect their access to leadership positions and career advancement	3.5	1.05
Leadership styles standardized by industry leaders have great importance on the role of women in leadership positions	3.0	1.1
Gender diversity should be considered while offering higher-level managerial positions	3.1	1.1
Gender diversity impacts interpersonal leadership skills and style	3.3	1.0
Gender diversity limits the assignment of certain tasks, impacting leadership development skills	3.6	1.05
Ethical challenges in providing opportunities to women in leadership positions	3.3	1.1
Women in unprecedented leadership positions significantly impact global women's empowerment rate	3.4	1.05
There is a significant gender equality gap in leadership positions	3.5	1.05
Motivational leadership style and personality affect gender diversity and leadership behavior	3.0	1.1
Gender diversity has no effect on perceived leadership behavior and overall management effectiveness	2.6	1.2
Leadership style and job satisfaction are highly impacted by gender diversity	3.1	1.05
Gender inequality exists in various sectors	3.4	1.1
Women are second to men in various business sectors	3.5	1.1
Women's freedom to apply administrative style is restricted by traditional styles standardized by society	3.6	1.1
Behavioural gender diversity is directly linked to women being in lower leadership positions	3.5	1.1
Leadership style is correlated with management skills	2.9	1.15

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The first variable, cultural influences impacting gender diversity, shows a mean of 3.5 and a SD of 1.05, indicating moderate agreement with the idea that cultural influences affect gender diversity. However, the relatively high SD suggests that there is some variation in respondents' views. Similarly, the statement regarding opportunities for women leaders in the workplace being proportionally affected by cultural influences also received a high mean of 3.6 and an SD of 1.05, indicating strong agreement but with moderate variation. This suggests that while many respondents agree that cultural factors influence women's opportunities, there are differing levels of agreement.

Regarding women leaders' competencies across sectors, the mean of 3.4 with an SD of 1.0 reflects moderate agreement and indicates relatively consistent responses, signaling that respondents largely agree that women leaders have developed the necessary competencies, though opinions vary slightly. The variable of culture shaping beliefs and perceptions about leadership yielded a mean of 3.3 and a SD of 0.9, which shows moderate agreement

with the statement and relatively low variation, meaning there is a consensus among respondents regarding the role of culture in shaping leadership perceptions.

On the issue of culture and women's leadership experiences affecting career advancement, the mean is 3.5 with an SD of 1.05, suggesting a moderate agreement and diverse opinions on how these factors impact women's access to leadership roles. The item regarding leadership styles standardized by industry leaders received a mean of 3.0 and an SD of 1.1, which indicates more mixed responses, with some respondents neutral or disagreeing, and others agreeing with the importance of standardized leadership styles in affecting women's roles.

Respondents also expressed moderate to strong agreement with the statement that gender diversity should be considered in offering higher-level managerial positions (mean 3.1, SD 1.1). However, as reflected in the higher SD, there was significant variability in opinions about whether gender should be a factor in such decisions. Similar results were seen in the statement about gender

diversity impacting interpersonal leadership skills and styles (mean 3.3, SD 1.0) and limiting leadership development through task assignments (mean 3.6, SD 1.05). Both of these indicate agreement with the idea that gender diversity influences leadership behaviors, with some variability in the responses.

The statement about ethical challenges in offering women leadership opportunities garnered a mean of 3.3 and an SD of 1.1, showing moderate agreement with varying opinions on the ethical issues surrounding gender and leadership. Regarding the influence of women in unprecedented leadership positions on global women's empowerment, respondents agreed with a mean score of 3.4 and an SD of 1.05, again showing moderate agreement but with slight variations in responses. There is also moderate agreement on the presence of a gender equality gap in leadership positions (mean 3.5, SD 1.05).

Regarding motivational leadership styles and personality impacting gender diversity and leadership behavior, the mean of 3.0 and SD of 1.1 suggest a neutral to moderate agreement, with considerable variation in responses. However,

respondents largely disagreed with the idea that gender diversity have no effect on perceived leadership behavior and overall management effectiveness, as reflected in a lower mean of 2.6 and a higher SD of 1.2.

Subsequent inquiries about gender inequality in various sectors (mean 3.4, SD 1.1) and women being second to men in business sectors (mean 3.5, SD 1.1) show strong agreement with these concerns, though there is still some variation in responses. The statement about women's restricted freedom in applying administrative styles due to societal norms received the highest mean score of 3.6, indicating strong agreement, though responses varied to some degree, as shown by the SD of 1.1. Similarly, behavioral gender diversity being linked to lower leadership positions for women showed strong agreement (mean 3.5, SD 1.1). Finally, the statement about the correlation between leadership style and management skills had the lowest mean of 2.9 and the highest SD of 1.15, indicating a disagreement with the notion that leadership style is always correlated with management skills, with significant variation in respondents' opinions.

Table 3. Correlation matrix of cultural influences, gender diversity, and leadership variables

Variables	CI	GD	LS	TA	LSK	WUL	LE	EMP
CI	1							
GD	0.62 (0.000)	1						
LS	0.56 (0.001)	0.55 (0.002)	1					
TA	0.54 (0.003)	0.58 (0.001)	0.59 (0.000)	1				
LSK	0.53 (0.004)	0.57 (0.002)	0.60 (0.000)	0.63 (0.000)	1			
WUL	0.59 (0.000)	0.63 (0.000)	0.68 (0.000)	0.65 (0.000)	0.66 (0.000)	1		
LE	0.50 (0.003)	0.62 (0.000)	0.67 (0.000)	0.61 (0.001)	0.69 (0.000)	0.75 (0.000)	1	
EMP	0.61 (0.000)	0.65 (0.000)	0.70 (0.000)	0.64 (0.000)	0.67 (0.000)	0.78 (0.000)	0.80 (0.000)	1

Note: Cultural influences (CI), Gender diversity (GD), Leadership styles (LS), Task assignments (TA), Leadership skills (LSK), Women in leadership (WUL), Leadership effectiveness (LE), Empowerment (EMP).
Source: Authors' elaboration.

The correlation matrix in Table 3 reveals significant relationships between cultural influences, gender diversity, and various leadership variables. Cultural influences show a strong positive correlation with gender diversity, leadership styles, task assignments, and women in leadership roles, highlighting the powerful role that culture plays in shaping gender-based leadership dynamics. Specifically, cultural influences have a significant correlation with gender diversity (0.62, Sig. 0.000), suggesting that cultural norms significantly impact gender roles in leadership positions. Additionally, cultural influences are strongly linked to leadership styles (0.56, Sig. 0.001), task assignments (0.54, Sig. 0.003), and women in leadership (0.59, Sig. 0.000), emphasizing how culture impacts leadership approaches and the participation of women in leadership positions. Gender diversity themselves exhibits a strong correlation with leadership styles (0.55, Sig. 0.002), task assignments (0.58, Sig. 0.001), and leadership skills (0.57, Sig. 0.002), indicating that gender influences both the way leadership is enacted and the development of leadership competencies. Moreover, gender diversity also correlates positively with leadership effectiveness (0.62, Sig. 0.000) and empowerment (0.65, Sig. 0.000), suggesting that gender disparities in leadership roles directly affect both the perceived effectiveness of leaders and the empowerment of individuals in the organization. Women in leadership positions show a particularly strong correlation with leadership effectiveness (0.75, Sig. 0.000) and empowerment

(0.78, Sig. 0.000), reinforcing the idea that increasing female representation in leadership roles significantly boosts both empowerment and leadership outcomes. Empowerment itself also demonstrates strong correlations with leadership effectiveness (0.80, Sig. 0.000) and women in leadership (0.78, Sig. 0.000), confirming the integral role empowerment plays in enhancing leadership quality. The correlations in Table 3 indicate that cultural influences and gender diversity are intricately linked to multiple aspects of leadership, especially regarding empowerment and leadership effectiveness, with culture significantly shaping leadership behaviors and opportunities for women.

Table 4. Model summary: Composite measure of leadership dimensions

Model	R	R-square	Adjusted R-square	Std. error of the estimate
1	0.705	0.495	0.460	0.870

Note: Predictors: (Constant), a composite measure of leadership dimensions (Culture shapes beliefs and perceptions, Interpersonal leadership skills, Leadership style, Leadership behavior). Dependent variable: Gender diversity in leadership position.
Source: Authors' elaboration.

Table 4, the model summary table, presents an overview of the regression model's overall fit, which seeks to elucidate the variance in gender disparities in leadership positions through a composite measure of leadership dimensions as predictors, including cultural influences on beliefs

and perceptions, interpersonal leadership skills, leadership style, and leadership behavior. An R-value of 0.705 indicates a moderate to high positive correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable, indicating that the predictors together account for a substantial percentage of the variation in gender disparities in leadership roles. The model, with an R² of 0.495, accounts for 49.5% of the variability in the dependent variable, indicating a moderate degree of explanatory power. The adjusted R² of 0.460, which accounts for the number of predictors, indicates that about 46% of the variance is explained after considering the model's complexity, hence affirming the significance of the predictors.

Table 5. ANOVA: Composite measure of leadership dimensions

Model 1	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	53.734	6	8.956	8.698	0.000
Residual	117.373	132	1.030		
Total	171.107	138			

Note: Predictors: (Constant), a composite measure of leadership dimensions (Culture shapes beliefs and perceptions, Interpersonal leadership skills, Leadership style, Leadership behavior). Dependent variable: Gender diversity in leadership position.
Source: Authors' elaboration.

Table 5 presents the analysis of variance for the regression model. The F-statistic is 8.698, accompanied by a p-value of 0.000, indicating the statistical significance of the model. This indicates that the variables used in the model (Cultural influences on attitudes and perceptions, Interpersonal leadership competencies, Leadership style, and Leadership conduct) combined account for a substantial amount of the variation in gender disparities in leadership roles. The sum of squares for the regression is 53.734, indicating the variance elucidated by the model, but the residual value of 117.373 signifies the unexplained variance. The entire sum of squares, indicating the overall variation in the dependent variable, is 171.107. The mean square values for regression and residuals are 8.956 and 1.030, respectively. The significance value of 0.000 validates the statistical significance of the model.

Table 6. Coefficients: Composite measure of leadership dimensions

Model 1	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		
	Beta	Std. error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.305	0.381		0.801	0.425
Culture shapes beliefs and perceptions	0.327	0.105	0.306	3.136	0.013
Interpersonal leadership skills	0.102	0.120	0.066	0.680	0.450
Leadership style	0.297	0.125	0.248	2.600	0.009
Leadership behaviour	0.112	0.099	0.098	1.089	0.268

Note: Dependent variable: Gender diversity in leadership position.
Source: Authors' elaboration.

Table 6, the coefficients table, delineates the correlation between each predictor and gender disparities in leadership roles. The constant has a B-value of 0.305; nevertheless, the p-value of 0.425 indicates a lack of statistical significance. Culture influences attitudes and perceptions, with a B-value of 0.327 and a p-value of 0.013, indicating a substantial beneficial impact on gender disparities in leadership roles. Interpersonal leadership abilities have a B-value of 0.102; nevertheless, the p-value of 0.450 indicates that they do not substantially influence gender disparities in leadership roles. The leadership style exhibits a B-value of 0.297 and a p-value of 0.009, indicating a substantial beneficial impact on gender disparities in leadership roles. The leadership behavior has a B-value of 0.112; nevertheless, the p-value of 0.268 indicates a lack of meaningful influence.

5. DISCUSSION

This research offers essential insights into the impact of cultural and organizational variables on gender diversity in senior positions within Saudi governmental organizations. The demographic study indicates a notable gender imbalance, with male respondents constituting 66.7% and female respondents accounting for just 28.3%. This disparity reflects wider socioeconomic patterns, whereby males persist in occupying leadership roles despite the increasing availability of a highly educated and competent female workforce (Syed et al., 2018; Alhassan & Al Doghan, 2022). The disproportionate representation of mid-level (37.7%) and middle management (32.6%) respondents indicates that institutional barriers, especially those associated with organizational hierarchies and leadership expectations, may impede the career progression of women in public organizations (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Sian et al., 2020).

Descriptive statistical research confirms the significant influence of cultural variables on gender diversity in leadership. The survey respondents demonstrated a moderate to strong agreement with the impact of cultural norms on women's leadership chances, yielding a mean score of 3.6 (SD = 1.05). This finding corresponds with the studies conducted by Abadi et al. (2022) and Hodges (2017), which highlighted the significant impact of traditional cultural norms in Saudi Arabia on leadership views and possibilities for women. The mean score of 3.3 (SD = 0.9) regarding culture's impact on perceptions and attitudes toward leadership demonstrates significant consensus among respondents, underscoring the pivotal role of cultural frameworks in shaping leadership behavior and opportunities (van Emmerik et al., 2008).

The survey reveals mixed opinions on the influence of standardized leadership styles on gender equality in leadership positions, with a mean of 3.0 (SD = 1.1). This result indicates that while leadership styles are acknowledged as significant, there is little agreement on their function in promoting gender-inclusive leadership (Al-Shamrani, 2013). The divergent perspectives may indicate the conflict between traditional hierarchical leadership and the increasing acknowledgment of inclusive, transformational leadership styles linked to women leaders (Al-Shamrani, 2013; Górska, 2016).

A correlation study indicates significant relationships between cultural factors and gender disparities in leadership. There are substantial

correlations between cultural characteristics and leadership styles ($r = 0.56$, $p = 0.001$), task assignments ($r = 0.54$, $p = 0.003$), and the proportion of women in leadership positions ($r = 0.59$, $p < 0.001$). These results highlight the significance of acknowledging cultural aspects in the analysis of leadership diversity in Saudi Arabia (Hodges, 2017; Abalkhail, 2017). Furthermore, disparities in gender representation within leadership roles were strongly correlated with leadership efficacy ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$) and empowerment ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.001$), underscoring the substantial influence of gender diversity on the perceived effectiveness and empowerment of leaders (Khan & Varshney, 2013; Jamjoom & Mills, 2022).

Regression analysis corroborates these results, demonstrating that cultural impacts on leadership attitudes ($\beta = 0.327$, $p = 0.013$) and leadership style ($\beta = 0.297$, $p = 0.009$) are significant predictors of gender diversity in leadership roles. The model summary indicates an R-value of 0.705, indicating a moderate to high positive correlation between the independent variables and gender disparities in leadership. The R^2 value of 0.495 indicates that about 50% of the variance in gender gaps may be attributed to cultural and leadership style characteristics, underscoring their significance in influencing gender diversity in leadership positions (Groves & LaRocca, 2011). The ANOVA analysis validated the model's robustness, shown by a statistically significant F-statistic of 8.698 ($p < 0.001$), hence confirming the results' validity.

Notably, interpersonal leadership abilities ($\beta = 0.102$, $p = 0.450$) and leadership conduct ($\beta = 0.112$, $p = 0.268$) did not have statistically significant benefits in this setting. This indicates that while these characteristics are important, they may be more shaped by overarching cultural and structural dynamics rather than exerting independent impacts on gender gaps (McCleskey, 2014). This discovery aligns with the research of Alsubaie and Jones (2017), who emphasized that organizational frameworks and cultural conventions often surpass individual leadership abilities in influencing career progression possibilities for women.

This study's findings underscore the pressing need for organizational changes to eliminate cultural biases and leadership frameworks that hinder women's progression into leadership roles. Due to the significant association between gender diversity and leadership efficacy (Khan & Varshney, 2013), programs that foster gender-inclusive leadership need to be emphasized to improve organizational performance and leadership dynamics. Future studies should investigate the relationship between cultural views and leadership development activities, examining how these elements might be managed to promote gender equality in leadership positions within Saudi governmental organizations.

6. CONCLUSION

This research offers significant insights into the impact of cultural and organizational variables on gender diversity in leadership within Saudi governmental institutions. The results indicate that, despite continuous reforms and policy initiatives associated with Saudi Vision 2030, women are still markedly underrepresented in leadership positions, primarily due to deep-rooted cultural norms, organizational biases, and prevailing leadership

stereotypes (Syed et al., 2018; Alhassan & Al Doghan, 2022). The descriptive statistical study reveals a significant gender imbalance, with male leaders prevailing in leadership roles, while women face institutional barriers that hinder their progression. The correlation and regression analyses highlight the significant impact of cultural perceptions and leadership styles on gender diversity in leadership, emphasizing that traditional, male-dominated leadership models impede women's advancement (Hodges, 2017; Alqahtani, 2021).

The study's findings confirm the research gap, indicating that although women in leadership often display transformative and inclusive leadership styles, these attributes are often underappreciated in Saudi public organizations (Al-Shamrani, 2013). The robust association between gender diversity and leadership efficacy underscores the need for structural modifications in leadership frameworks to foster inclusive governance and equitable opportunities (McCleskey, 2014; Jamjoom & Mills, 2022). Regression analysis indicates that cultural factors affecting beliefs, leadership behaviors, and organizational frameworks are substantial predictors of gender disparities in leadership, underscoring the necessity for focused interventions at both policy and institutional levels (Groves & LaRocca, 2011; Alsubaie & Jones, 2017).

Organizations must adopt proactive gender-inclusive policies to tackle these challenges, including leadership training programs for women, mentorship initiatives, and structured career progression frameworks that eradicate biases in leadership selection and promotion (Alomair, 2015; Abu Alsuood & Youde, 2018). Cultural reorientation initiatives must be implemented to confront entrenched gender prejudices and foster diversity in leadership across all organizational tiers (Al-Dajani & Alsahli, 2021; Pick, 2024).

This research enhances the discourse on gender diversity and governance in Saudi Arabia; nonetheless, its conclusions are constrained by certain constraints. The sample size, although typical of Saudi public enterprises, may not comprehensively reflect industry-specific gender discrepancies, and self-reported data may introduce response biases (Tremmel & Wahl, 2023; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Future research needs to implement longitudinal studies to investigate the enduring effects of gender diversity policies and analyze sector-specific leadership dynamics, especially in senior government and business roles (Arayssi, 2020; Aladwey & Alsudays, 2023).

This research underscores the essential need for gender-inclusive leadership practices in Saudi public organizations. By confronting cultural obstacles, leadership stereotypes, and systemic biases, policymakers and corporate executives can establish more equitable leadership opportunities for women, thereby aligning with Saudi Arabia's national transformation objectives for female empowerment and sustainable economic development (Jrasat & Zubaidi, 2024; Chung & Grichting Solder, 2024). The results urge companies and politicians to implement systemic change, promoting an inclusive and diverse leadership environment that maximizes the potential of both men and women in leadership positions.

Despite its strengths, this study has some limitations. The sample size may inadequately represent the intricacies of gender diversity throughout all Saudi public entities (Tabassum &

Nayak, 2021). Moreover, self-reported data may be susceptible to social desirability bias, when respondents provide responses, they consider socially acceptable instead of entirely factual (Tremmel & Wahl, 2023). The subsequent study needs to broaden sample diversity and investigate sector-specific gender obstacles to improve the generalizability of results (Al-Dajani & Alsahli, 2021).

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