

Sociocultural Factors Influencing Women's participation in political Leadership in Kakamega County, Kenya

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Abstract: Kenya still falls short of the (2/3rd) gender parity rule in National and County political leadership. Articles 27(8) and (81) (b) of the Kenyan Constitution sought to increase women's representation by requiring a minimum of one-third representation of either gender in all elected and public posts. The Kenyan Constitution (2010) sought to correct past historical gender discrimination and injustices. However, Kenya's male-dominated political arena has been hesitant to enact legislation to execute the gender quota law, unlike its neighboring countries. This problem has been exacerbated by sociocultural underpinnings existing in many Kenyan societies. The purpose of this study was to establish how sociocultural factors influence women's ascend to political leadership in Kenya's Kakamega County. The study adopted a descriptive research design. One hundred and sixty respondents were interviewed using a questionnaire. Another twelve key informants were also interviewed using an interview guide. Quantitative data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistics and the Chi Square tests with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. The qualitative data, mainly from key informants was analyzed thematically using content analysis. The study established that the community was still highly patriarchal, and that there were sociocultural forces which appeared to influence decisions on women's ascending to political power. 62.4% of the respondents believed that the roles of women in the community do not include leadership; another 62.3% also stated that domestic duties of women would not allow good representation. Many respondents (52.5%) still believed that political leadership was a domain for men. Respondents with higher levels of education appeared more accommodating of women political leaders. The study recommends intensive education to be given to the community, particularly to the male members of the community to value women leadership. This education should be tailored to help improve the communities' perspectives of gender roles in modern society.

Keywords: Sociocultural, Women, Leadership, Gender, Political, representation

I. INTRODUCTION

Women's representation and participation in politics has been an uphill task, not only in Kenya but throughout the world. Although women make up the majority of voters, women's electoral rights are only more evident when they vote than when they run for office. An examination of the current makeup of political decision-makers world over still

demonstrates that women continue to struggle to articulate and shape their own interests (IDEA, 2005). Women's access to legislative positions is influenced by a variety of circumstances. Women who are interested in politics frequently find themselves in adverse political, public, cultural, and social contexts. All over the world, women's political participation is minimal, slow, and discouraging. The gap between women's formal and actual power is also about prejudice and sexism, often unconscious. Even in countries with liberal multi-party politics and progressive constitutions, common beliefs and expectations about what women and men can and should do block women's political power and advancement (Chappell & Waylen, 2013.)

There have been obvious, albeit uneven, advancements in gender equality over the last fifty years, contradicting the idea that gender orders are immutable and rigid. According to the 2021 edition of the IPU-UN Women Map of Women in Politics, despite gains in the number of women at the highest levels of political authority, severe gender inequities persist. Women still hold only 23% of seats in national legislatures around the world. The Beijing Platform for Action meeting in 1995 that sought to correct this imbalance contained a call for member countries to implement a declaration advocating for 30% women in decision-making positions and inclusive representation of women in both elective and appointive roles. Men's historical and continuing dominance inside political organizations is self-evident. However, in parliaments, executive positions, political parties, and even in international organizations, men continue to outnumber women in terms of representation and power (Goetz, 2007; Chappell & Waylen, 2013).

Women's access to the political process through established political groupings is limited because political parties, ethnic groups, and clans are often dominated by a single, prominent leader, usually a man (IPU, 2019). Gender stereotypes, psychological and historic hurdles, and discrepancies in education, training, and resources are among the many obstacles to women's equitable participation in elections, according to the United Nations (UN, 2005). Women's political participation rights are hampered by cultural expectations and societal norms, exclusion from male-

dominated decision-making platforms, a lack of financial resources, limited access to knowledge and expertise, discrimination, and rampant violence (IPU, 2019). Other hurdles, such as particular types of electoral systems or candidacy restrictions based on educational credentials or other considerations may be placed into political structures. Limited political participation by women is further exacerbated in post-conflict cultures, which frequently erect extra barriers to women's equal election participation. Many researchers have argued that sociocultural factors are the major hindrance to women's participation in leadership positions despite their capabilities and qualifications (Zunge, 1996; Dodo, 2013; and Dodo and Zihanzu, 2017).

In many countries around the world, women's participation and representation in executive and legislative decision-making bodies has increased in recent decades, although progress has been slow and inconsistent around the world. O'Neal and Domingo (2016) reported that around the World, women now have more decision-making power influence over more aspects of social, political and economic life than even before. According to the Gender Quotas Database (2021), an increasing number of countries are now introducing various types of gender quotas for public elections, which involve allocating a certain number or percentage of seats to under-represented groups as a tool for increasing women's political participation. In reality, half of the world's parliaments now use some form of electoral quota (legislated candidate quota, reserved seats quota, or political party quota) to encourage women to participate in elective politics, but these quotas have yet to pay off.

In Africa, women have been excluded from most of the important leadership positions. Those represented in legislative organs, their numbers have remained minimal as compared to their male counterparts. Despite increased knowledge and measures to encourage women to play an active role in politics, Foulds (2014), Sifuna, (2006) and Omwami (2015) argue that women are less likely to be elected or appointed to public office. This is particularly true in African countries, where political culture may have an impact on both whether women are willing to run for office and the criteria used by gatekeepers such as party members and leaders, the media, financial supporters, or the electorate when assessing suitable candidates (Norris and Inglehart, 2000). Cornwall and Goetz (2005) also raise concern about the prospects for working through informal arenas to transcend patriarchal hierarchies. They point out that these informal structures or informal associations that either relegate women to domestic chores or condition women's advancement to leadership positions on patronage from a senior male leader.

More than half African countries (20 out of 35) have made progress toward gender parity, with Togo, having increased from 61.5 percent to 68.3 percent women representation in parliament. By the year 2021, Namibia, Mozambique, and Eswatini had greatly improved (by at least 2.5 percentage

points), allowing them to move up many places in the global rankings (WEF, 2021). In 2022, Mozambique became one of 14 countries in the world with at least half of its ministers being women. It is the third African country to achieve gender equality in the cabinet (All Africa, 2022). Gender parity has been attained in other African countries of Rwanda, South Africa, Namibia, Tanzania, Burundi, and Uganda; Kenya lags behind its East African neighbors with 28.8% women parliamentary representation, illustrating the pervasiveness of Kenya's political system.

In Kenya, women make up a large percentage (47%) of the registered voters (Ngele and Begisen, 2017). The Kenyan Constitution sought to increase women's representation by requiring a minimum of one-third representation of either gender in all elected and public posts. However, this has not happened mainly due to the male-dominated political arena that has been hesitant to enact legislation to execute this gender quota law and the sociocultural underpinnings which negatively influence the election of women into political positions. Patriarchal customs stifle women's participation in political processes in Kenya (Roberts and Karambayya, 2017). Traditional attitudes toward women in decision-making roles are still prevalent in today's Kenyan political culture. Beliefs regarding gender equality are frequently cited as a significant element in elevating women's election to public office (Rule and Zimmerman, 1994; 1997).

The objective of this study was to identify the sociocultural factors that influence women in politics in Kakamega County. These sociocultural variables originate in households and communities and extend to the national level affecting women's political participation in terms of election to political offices. A current glance of the political decision-makers in Western Kenya, particularly in Kakamega County, reveals that women challenges in articulating and developing their own interests due to under representation. Except for three women who were elected in their wards (out of 41 wards) and one women's representative in the legislature (who is a position specifically reserved for women), the other 8 women in Kakamega County politics are nominated.

The low representation and participation of women in political leadership in Kakamega county negates the equity that is affirmed in the Constitution and agreed to in gender equality platforms in the context of various United Nations (UN) resolutions, such as Article 21 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals that aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination, abuse, and harmful behavior against women and girls in the public and private sectors by 2030, and the UN General Assembly's 1979 adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Sociocultural theory/Social Role Theory (SRT)

This study is guided by the Social Role Theory proposed by Eagly and Wood in 1999 and is also known as the Eagly-

Wood Theory (SRT). Gender disparities are the outcome of two interconnected processes, according to the social role theory (SRT): social learning and societal power relations behavior (House, 1981; Kacmar, Bachrach, Harris, & Zivnuska, 2011). Gender-appropriate behavior is often learned through social modeling and reinforced through society's power and status systems. According to Kacmar et al. (2011), people internalize gender roles that society has defined, and they have a predisposition to understand the environment and behave in ways that conform to the societal expectations associated with these roles. According to Kacmar et al., (2011) women and men respond to social information in predictable ways, which leads to communal or agentic behavior patterns over time. Agentic behavior patterns are competitive and success driven and they are more frequent in men. Communal behavior patterns are nurturing and socially oriented, and they are more prevalent in women.

Social and cultural expectations or gender stereotypes contribute to the notion that there are male Social and cultural expectations, as well as gender stereotypes, contribute to the idea that there are male and female-only jobs. According to social role theory, mate preferences are based on cultural expectations, which means that there are commonly held expectations for ideal male and female partners in each society. These expectations, or social roles, are shaped by a society's ideals, which are shaped by a variety of restrictions. From a sociocultural standpoint, for example, women in most societies have less social and economic authority than men. Women joining male-dominated fields face cultural inconsistencies between people's perceptions about what it takes to succeed in certain fields and prejudices about women's characteristics (e.g., Eagly and Karau, 2002). As a result, even highly qualified women may be perceived as lacking the qualities required for success. These ideas, however, are not unavoidable. People may adopt new opinions about women's traits as they take on unconventional roles, because these perceptions are influenced by role performance.

II. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study adopted a cross-cultural study design. This design was preferred since it offered the most suitable approach for comparing behavior of the county inhabitants regarding women leadership choices in Kakamega County. The research study used a mixed methods approach and triangulated results to help answer the research questions. This was done through a qualitative evaluation of the underlying structures of political leadership and leadership in Kakamega County using an ethnographic approach. The general population views were captured using structured questionnaires and there were also in-depth interviews with key informants. This approach was useful in giving answers of the required sociocultural dimensions such as who, how, what, which, when and how much. 160 respondents were randomly selected using available household data. Another 12 key informants were purposively selected for the study. Data obtained was

analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi square tests and content analysis. This research study received approval from the Department of Sociology of Eduardo Mondlane University.

III. STUDY FINDINGS

Political representation by a woman at the County or the National Assembly

Respondents were asked if they would vote for a woman to represent them at the county and national assembly. The results are presented in Table 1

Table 1: Gender views on female representation at the National Assembly (N=152)

Gender	Yes		No	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Male	21	26%	58	73.4%
Female	22	30%	51	69.8%
Total	43	28.0%	109	72.0%

It was observed that a majority of the respondents (72%) were not willing to have a woman as their representative either at the county or National assembly. Most of the respondents who were of this view were males (73.4%). Interestingly, a large percentage of female respondents (69.8%) were also not willing to have a female representative at the national assembly. Many of key informants were of the opinion that often, women appeared not trust women politicians because of gender issues such as beauty or clothing and are often heard shouting insults at women aspirants about these issues in campaign crowds.

This finding reveals that the community in the study area appeared still not ready to have a woman representative in political leadership at the County and National assembly. The key informant interviews also revealed a similar view, with most key informants admitting that it was still hard to convince members of the community that women would offer good political leadership.

This finding is similar to study findings by Awour (2013) and Canudo & Ali, (2017) in Kenya. In these studies, the findings revealed a situation where the male participants were not willing to vote for a female in political competitions.

Reasons for preferring a Male representation at the County and National Assembly

When the 109 respondents who had said they were not willing to have a woman as their representative at the National assembly were asked to give reasons, a variety of reasons were given. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Reasons for not preferring a woman to represent the community at the county or National Assembly

Reason	Male n=58		Female n=51		Overall Frequency N=109
	Count	%	Count	%	%
Women are weak and cannot adequately fight for our rights	46	80%	10	20%	61%
Domestic duties of women will not allow good representation	46	80%	22	43%	62.3%
It would be difficult to reach women when we have issues that require assistance.	44	76%	26	50.93%	64.2%
Women cannot lead us in this community	51	87.9%	2	0.4%	52.2%
The roles of women in our community do not include leadership	54	93.1%	14	27.4%	62.4%
Women cannot campaign like men to win the political seats	52	89.6%	35	68.7%	79.8%
Women lack resources to compete with men	51	87.9%	50	98.0%	92.6%

Source Field Data, 2021

From Table 2, it is observed that respondents overwhelmingly felt that women lack resources to compete with men in elective positions. A large percentage of the respondents (79.8%) were also in agreement that women cannot campaign like men to win political seats. A large percentage (61%) of the study participants still had the attitude that women are weak and could not adequately fight for the study participants rights. A majority of the respondents that displayed this attitude were the males (80%). A key finding of the responses from the male participants (93.1%) was that the roles of women in the community do not include leadership.

These findings are indicative of the gender roles assigned to the males and females in the society. In the predominantly Luhya community, the notion of a female leading men is just slowly taking root through appointments of Chiefs by the government, traditionally, all the leaders in the community were male, with women being sidelined. Even the council of elders, who would offer advice to the leaders in the traditional kinship system, were men. The stories told by the elders and which are passed on from generation to generation have also tended to depict the males as strong and leaders. In all the responses, more males (>76%) gave answers that looked at leadership and power as belonging to the male gender.

From these findings, many voters' expectations of leaders appear to overlap with masculine rather than supposedly feminine characteristics. This can be attributed to the patriarchal nature of the Luhya society. The respondents' observations could also be influenced by what Hofstede (2010) refers to as 'power distance,' or formal structures in some societies that prioritize the male gender in positions of power over the female gender in less powerful roles.

Inglehart's (1997) cultural framework also sheds light on the importance of traditional values in cultures that are resistant to change and deeply rooted.

These findings also agree with findings of a study by Arnal (2012). Because of social, cultural, religious, and patriarchal constructs, political leadership in Kenyan politics is still associated with attributes associated with masculinity, distorting narrative about women's ability to lead. As a result, what voters expect from leaders has more in common with masculine traits than with ostensibly feminine traits. The majority of female leaders is cast in masculine roles (Arnal, 2012). Leadership then becomes gender-specific rather than sex-specific, according to Sjoberg (2014). Because of her gender, a woman leader is more likely than a man to be questioned when making a personal or collective decision. Furthermore, some studies of female leaders have found that women's private lives receive more attention than men's during their time in government and during campaigns (Tickner, 2001).

Level of Education and willingness to elect a woman to the National Assembly

The study sought to establish how level of education influenced willingness to elect a woman in the county assembly or National assembly by examining level of education for the respondents who said they would vote for a woman.

Table3: Level of Education and willingness to vote for a Female candidate (n=43)

Level of Education	Count	No who would vote for a Woman	Frequency
No formal Education	4	0	0%
Up to KCPE/CPE level	12	2	16.66%
Ordinary level	90	12	13.33%
College Level and beyond	46	29	63.04%
Totals	152	43	100%

Source: Field Data

It was observed from Table 3 that willingness to vote for a female candidate in political contest was associated with level of education This pattern is clear when we examine the numbers of the people who have college and tertiary level of education (63%) who would vote for a female candidate as a representative with those who had no formal education (0%). This finding implies that people with higher levels of education can be more accommodating of a woman political leader.

Marital status and willingness to elect a woman to the National Assembly

The study sought to establish how marital status influenced willingness to elect a woman in the county assembly or National assembly. The results are presented in Table 4

Table 4: Marital status and willingness to elect a woman to the National Assembly (N=43)

Marital Status	Total No.	Willing to vote for a woman	Frequency
Married	83	31	72.09%
Single	59	10	23.2%
widowed	10	2	4.06%
Total	152	43	100%

It was observed that among those who were willing to vote for a female candidate, a majority (72%) were married. This finding indicates that marital status has an influence on the gender choice of political leadership.

Age and willingness to elect a woman to the National Assembly

The study sought to establish how the age of the respondent influenced willingness to elect a woman in the county assembly or National assembly. The results are presented in Table 5

Table 5: Age and willingness to elect a woman to the National Assembly (N=43)

Age	Count	No. Willing to elect a woman representative	Frequency
18-25 years	22	2	4.6%
26-35 years	28	6	13.95%
36-45 years	42	12	27.9%
46-55 years	52	18	41.8%
Above 55 years	8	7	16.27%
Total	152	43	100%

Socio-Cultural factors that influence women attainment of political leadership in Kakamega County

The respondents were asked to identify the sociocultural factors that influenced the attainment of political leadership. The results are tabulated in Table 4.8

Table 6: Socio Cultural factors that influence women attainment of political leadership (N=152)

Socio-cultural factor	Count	Frequency
1. Traditional kinship socialization creates significant limitations to women ascending to political leadership	140	92.10%
2. Traditional kinship denying resources for seeking political leadership	138	90.78%
3. Religious teachings have also failed in addressing gender discrimination for political leadership	110	72.36%
4. High demands on women time as gender roles reduce their chances of ascending to political leadership	139	91.44%
5. Political violence reduces women chances of campaigning effectively	127	83.55%
6. Women levels of Education inhibit their ascending to political leadership positions	107	70.39%
7. Women have poor leadership attributes	92	60.52%

More than 90% of the study participants were of the opinion that the traditional kinship socialization creates significant limitations to women ascending to political leadership. Many stories are told of men who conquered, who were good leaders, who were tyrants, but few if any are said of in the study area of women who were good leaders. This finding is in line with findings by Kasomo (2012) and Sjoberg's (2014) in which they argued that leadership has been linked to masculinity. As a the definition of a good leader is frequently linked to masculine characteristics or what the respondents consider to be a good man, whereas being a good woman has nothing to do with being a good leader (Sjoberg, 2014). This could also be due to fear in many men as to being overtaken by women, this means that women seeking political or public positions are expected to portray masculine than feminine roles. As one key informant observed

'A strong woman poses a threat. As a result, women are referred to as "helpers," and women are not supposed to overtake men; instead, they should remain behind and observe. Being a strong and independent woman is seen as too masculine, which is unacceptable' (Key Informant observation, 2021).

Majority of the respondents (91.44%) were of the opinion that high demands on women time as gender roles reduce their chances of ascending to political leadership. Women's roles in many societies including those of women in the study area are limited to family and household maintenance. This finding is in agreement with study findings by Ahmed Ali (2015) in which it was reported that most African communities had defined gender roles. As a result, women find it more difficult to enter politics than men, which sustains into a negative attitude toward female leaders. African women, on the other hand, have long played significant roles in the economic, social, and religious spheres such as peacemakers, conflict mediators, and resource managers

60.5% of the respondents were of the view that women have poor leadership attributes when compared to men, this finding corroborates with a finding by Cannuto and Ali (2017), in a study on 'Exploring Feminine Political Leadership Attributes and Women's Campaigns During the 2017 General Election in Kenya. The study participants who saw women as having poor leadership attributes from men mentioned desirable characteristics that women leaders lack as determination, perseverance, aggressiveness, persuasion, responsiveness, confidence, moderation, modesty, integrity and assertiveness. The majority of these characteristics are associated with masculinity rather than femininity, and this means that women must therefore work harder than men during campaigns to portray themselves as authoritative and strong leaders if they want to achieve their political goals. Moreover, women must work harder than men because they do not have the same privileges, opportunities, and resources. The patriarchal culture also contributes to the definition of women's political attributes because it is assumed that only men make good leaders due to their character (perceived as strong, focused,

assertive, and dominant) in comparison to women's perceived non-leadership characteristics (emotional, careful, timid, etc. The patriarchal nature of socialization is deeply engraved in the society such that some women see it as a right for the men to be leaders this can be seen in one respondent's comment on why she could not vote for a woman.

We [women] are more emotional beings than men, and we often make decisions based on our emotions rather than our intellect. I suppose it's difficult for us women to strike a balance between the two. -(Female respondent in the study,2021).

A key informant also added his voice to the patriarchal nature of the society by stating the following

Single, widowed, or divorced women in leadership face challenges in the context of community expectations of perfect families. Women may also encounter opposition if they portray themselves sexually or show an interest in beauty and fashion. This goes against the community's preconceptions that women must be respectable while remaining feminine (Female key informant, 2022).

These narratives denote how gender norms, values and ideologies that regulate and define unequal roles are incorporated. There is a hierarchy between men and women with regard to the enjoyment of the main civil, political and social rights. This translates into a lack of "full citizenship" for women and restrictions on the public role of women in the workplace and leadership, imposed by the division of female reproductive and male productive labor (Bustelo & Lombardo, 2006).

Political Violence

Participants in the study viewed women and men as having different attributes, outlined qualities such as determination, perseverance, aggressiveness, persuasion, responsiveness and confidence as desirable features for women leaders. Most of these attributes are associated with masculinity and not femininity, and women have to *resist all forms of violence perpetrated by men* during campaigns to portray themselves as authoritative and strong leaders if they want to achieve their goals in politics.

A large number of the respondents (83.33%) were of the opinion that political violence reduces women chances of campaigning effectively. This finding is similar to a finding by Akala (2017) in which he reports that many female aspirants cannot sustain the violence associated with Kenyan politics. One key informant who was a female aspirant in the 2017 general election described the scenario

'Immediately I took to the stage to articulate my points on why I was the best suited candidate to be the national assembly representative, men started shouting at me" Are you married? Where is your husband? Who will take care of the children and your husband? How old are you? What happens if we elect you and you get married to another community? Some of the utterances were unprintable, but mainly related to

my gender. Later on the crowd became wild and some people started throwing stones at me. The police fired teargas in the air and the crowd dispersed leaving me with a piece of paper with my points'- (Key informant who was a female Aspirant in the 2017 general election)

As a result, some female candidates for political office display masculine characteristics in order to be as visible and audible as their male counterparts. However, this masculinization of female leadership has a negative impact on women because they are forced to present themselves in a false light. Furthermore, the masculinization of women's leadership slows the shift in mentality within society, where women leaders are depicted as society constructs them rather than as their authentic selves.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the study findings, we conclude that although unwritten, informal rules weave together cultural, religious, and social expectations to constrain women's political agency in addition to formal institutions. As women's gender roles increase their responsibility for domestic care, these structural and cultural barriers, including those imposed by tradition, limit women's access to resources and place high demands on their time, resulting in vast resource and time deficits that benefit men while limiting women's opportunities for entry and political leadership. According to Kamau (2010), these factors have played a significant role in determining the political leadership expectations that the electorate/citizenry have for their elected officials. The study therefore recommends intensive education to both man and women to help recognise the changing gender roles in modern society,

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