

Contextual Factors Influencing Women's Participation in Political Leadership in Kakamega County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Women are still underrepresented in positions of political leadership despite making up half of the world's population. Numerous conventions, protocols, and international agreements exist for gender mainstreaming, along with advancements in tactics to boost women's political engagement, but all must demonstrate their efficacy in achieving gender parity in political representation. The state of affairs is especially appalling in developing nations. The lack of equal representation of women in leadership positions creates deeper, non-gender-based disparities that prevent women from participating in decision-making, participating in governance, and devising policies that address women's issues. Kenya has made efforts to establish gender equity in political leadership, although little progress has been made. This study sought to examine how selected contextual factors influence women's participation in political leadership in Kakamega County in Kenya. The study adopted a cross-cultural study design with a mixed methods approach. Structured Questionnaires were used to collect data from 160 respondents randomly selected from the study area. 16 key informants purposively selected for the study were also interviewed using Key informant interview guides. The data collection tools were pretested in Bungoma County and a reliability coefficient (r) of 0.78 attained. Quantitative data obtained was analyzed using the Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software version 23. Both descriptive statistics (means, modes, medians, standard deviations) and inferential statistics (Chi-Square and ANOVA) were used to analyze the data. Qualitative data obtained was analyzed thematically. The results revealed that the predominant patriarchal culture and the electoral system were unfavorable to women in electoral politics and attainment of political leadership. Additionally, unfriendly rules at formal institutions of Political parties, limited access to financial resources for political campaigns for women political aspirants, biases in the selection processes from political party candidates and the media were all an impediment for women political aspirants. The study recommends that the government and civil society launch civic education campaigns emphasizing the importance of women's participation in political leadership and representation. The government and civil society organizations should also organize tailored training and capacity building for female candidates on effective strategies for raising funds, as well as effective ways to use those funds. The media professionals should also be sensitized on the importance of equality in media coverage, as well as the need to portray women as capable leaders. Finally, the government should enforce electoral laws governing political violence, campaign spending limits, and the conduct of political parties.

Keywords: Contextual, women, political, leadership, representation

INTRODUCTION

Women's participation and access to political leadership 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 and leadership is minimal, slow, and discouraging. The gap between women's ambition and actual acquisition of formal power appears to be

more 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).

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.

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(s), usually men (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 for political leadership (UN, 2005). Women's political participation rights have usually been 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 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 need 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 some 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 but remain underrepresented in both executive and political leadership positions (Ngele and Begisen, 2017). The Kenyan Constitution (GOK,2010) sought to increase women's representation by requiring a minimum of one-third representation of either gender in all elected and public positions. However, this has not happened partly due to the male-dominated political arena that has been hesitant to enact legislation to execute this gender quota law and partly because of some contextual factors which negatively influence the election and appointment of women into political and leadership positions.

The objective of this study was to examine how selected contextual factors influence women's participation in political leadership Kakamega County in Kenya. The low representation and participation of women in political leadership in Kakamega county negates the equity that is affirmed and agreed to in the Kenyan Constitution and other gender equality platforms of the 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).

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 and ways of life of the county inhabitants regarding participation of women in leadership among the vast Luhya Community of Kakamega County in Kenya. The site of study was selected purposively. The study population included members of household aged above 18 years and selected Key informants. Households from the study area were selected randomly. The study used a mixed methods approach in two phases. The first phase examined the qualitative aspects underlying structures of political leadership and the general aspects about women leadership in western Kenya using an ethnographic approach. The second phase involved obtaining the general population views on women political leadership which were captured in a survey of opinions; there were also in-depth interviews with 16 purposely selected Key informants who included women political aspirants, women leader representatives in the community, the area leaders, the clergy, Leaders of political parties in the area and gatekeepers in the communities. The Qualitative data obtained was analyzed using content analysis by searching for patterns and themes from recorded information. The quantitative data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistics of means, modes and frequencies. Chi square test was used to analyze categorical data while ANOVA was used to analyze continuous data. Findings from both arms of analysis (the qualitative and quantitative) were triangulated to answer the research questions adequately. The Study received approval the Department of Sociology of Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique.

STUDY FINDINGS

Awareness of Constitutional rights for women participation in political leadership

The study sought to establish awareness of Constitutional rights for women participation in political leadership among the female respondents. The respondents were asked a number of questions regarding the women rights to participate in political leadership. These included knowledge of age at which a female citizen is allowed to vote; Knowledge of the requirements to vie for an electoral position; knowledge on the electoral positions a woman can vie for; knowledge of the gender composition requirements for the national and County assemblies.

The results were scored to determine the number of respondents who were knowledgeable .The results are presented in Table 1

Table 1: Awareness of Constitutional rights for women participation in political leadership (n=60)

Aspect of Knowledge tested	No of respondent with Knowledge (correct answers)	
	Count	Frequency
1. Knowledge on the right to vote	59	98%
2. Knowledge of electoral positions a woman can vie for	53	89.6%
3. Knowledge of requirements of gender composition of the National and County assembly	14	23%
4. Rights of a woman in political leadership in contests	38	64%

Source: Field data, (2021)

The results in table 1 show that the respondents were knowledgeable about their rights to vote (98%0), Knowledge of the electoral positions a woman could vie (89.6%) and the rights of a woman political contestant. The women were however, less knowledgeable on the gender composition requirements of the National and County assemblies. This finding implies that women may be affected in intention to vie for political leadership in these areas. If women were aware that the two thirds gender rule is a requirement in the constitution of Kenya, then it is likely that many women would attempt to vie for the positions in the National and county assemblies so as to meet the constitutional threshold..

Knowledge of women political leaders

The study also sought to establish whether there was awareness of female political leaders. The respondents were first asked if they knew any female political leader(s)in their area; out of 160 respondents 159 (99.4%) said they knew some female political leaders; Only 1 (0.6%) did not know of any female leader.

Further analysis of responses across gender revealed that in one study site of Navakholo area, males were significantly more knowledgeable of the female political leaders. The results of the Chi square test are presented in table 4.2

Table 2: Differences in Knowledge of female political leader(s) across gender among Respondents in Navakholo study site

Statistic	DF	Value	Probability
Chi-Square	2	13.9541	0.0009
Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square	2	14.5908	0.0007
Mantel-Haenszel Chi-Square	1	6.9668	0.0083
Phi Coefficient		0.4783	
Contingency Coefficient		0.4315	
Cramer's V		0.4783	

The results in Table 2 show that it was mainly the males (26.23) who knew of female political leaders compared to females (1.64%). Unlike the other study sites, it was observed that in Navakholo, there was a significant difference ($P>0.05$) in knowledge of female political leader(s) across gender among the respondents ($\chi^2 (2, 61) =13.9541$).

Knowledge of the how women attained political positions

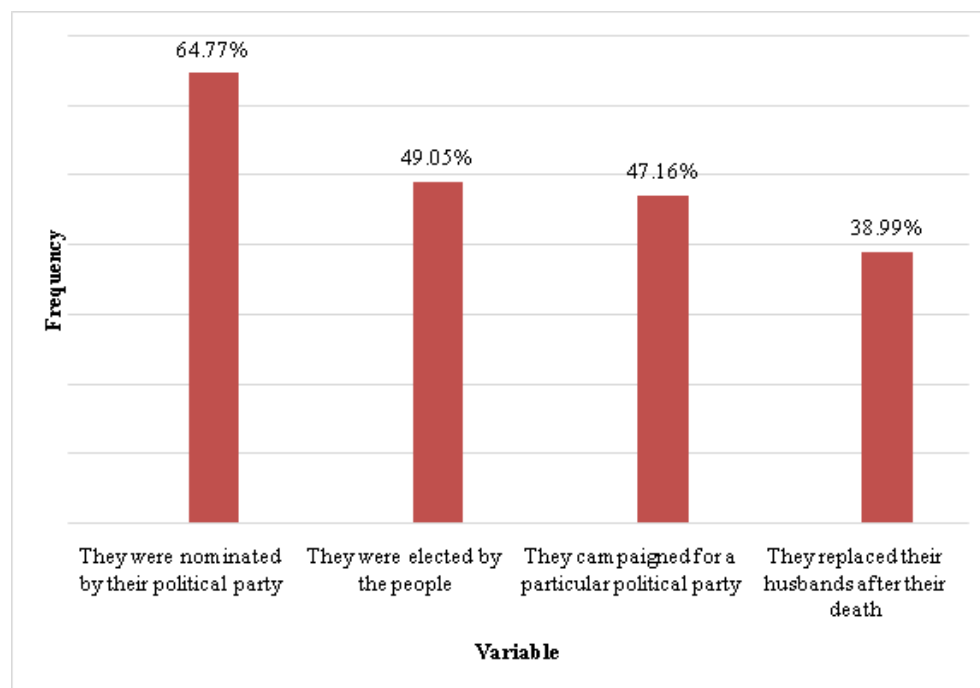
When the respondents were asked to give reasons as to how women political leaders attained the political positions they have, a variety of answers were given. The responses are presented in table 4.1 and Fig 4.1

Table 3: Reasons that led the women attaining the political position they have (n=159)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
They were nominated by their political party	103	64.4%
They were elected by the people	78	48.8%
They campaigned for a particular political party	75	46.9%
They replaced their deceased husbands	62	38.8%

Source: Field Data 2022

These data is further summarized in Fig.1



Source: Field data, 2022

Fig.1 How Women political leaders attained their current political positions

It was observed from Fig 1 that the respondents had many reasons as to how women political leaders attained the political positions they have, there were varied answers. The fact that the majority of respondents 103 (64.77%) and 75 (46.9%) said the women they knew of as political leaders were either nominated by their political party, campaigned for the party that eventually nominated them for the post or replaced their husbands after their death shows that the respondents were still apprehensive of women political leadership through political competition. It is true that women political leaders in Kakamega were largely nominated by their political parties to meet the requirements of the Political Parties Act of 2011 and also as a reward for their loyalty and campaign for their political party candidates. This is confirmed by one Key informant who said:

I went around all the 14 counties of Western Kenya campaigning for ODM because I knew the more votes the party got, the higher the chances for my nomination.-[Female Nominated senator 2013]

The implication of the finding of this question is that many people would consider it a waste of votes for the women, because women are usually not elected but nominated. This finding is similar to a study finding by Tundi (2013) in which she reported that many people in Bungoma County of Kenya had opted not to cast their vote for women because they were almost sure that the female candidates would not make it in elections. Perhaps this is among the reasons that many countries are coming up with gender quotas to make political representation gender inclusive. Gender quotas have benefited the participation of women in African political representation, according to IDEA (2020), since without gender quotas, women’s representation in more than half of African countries would not have even reached current levels. Kenya, unlike its East African neighbors, has not completely implemented the gender quota. Kenya has a bicameral parliament with regulated and voluntary party quotas in both the lower and upper chambers, as well as at the subnational level. Women have just 75 (21 percent) of the 350 seats in the national assembly. Parties violate the spirit of the law by prioritizing male candidates for elective seats and female candidates for nominated seats. However, this is a disadvantage to the future of women political leadership. Nominated members of national and county legislatures are not entitled to the same benefits, privileges, and development funds as elected members. Constituents evaluate the effectiveness of their representatives based on their ability to fund and spearhead development projects. Because most women held nominated seats and did not have the same resources as men, they were perceived to have less power and authority than their elected male colleagues.

Reasons why there are lesser women in the political arena than men

Respondents were asked for their opinions on why women were underrepresented in the political arena. The results to this question are presented in Table 4

Table 4: Reasons for lesser women representation in politics than men (n=160).

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Most women don’t trust themselves	118	73.8%
They don’t have money to campaign	118	73.8%
Culture is prohibitive	106	66.2%
They are prohibited by their husbands	104	65%
Women are supposed to be homemakers	80	50%
They Lack leadership skills	57	32.6%
All	7	4.3%
Other	4	2.5%

Source: Field Data, 2022

Majority 118 (73.8%) of the respondents believed that there is a lesser number of women in politics because women don’t trust in themselves (lack confidence) and they also lack money to campaign -118 (73.8%); followed by 106 (66.2%) and 104(65%) responding that culture is prohibitive to women from involvement in politics or they are prohibited by their husbands.80 (50%) believed that women are supposed to be homemakers and not involve themselves in political leadership. Only 57 (32.6%) believed that women lack leadership skills with 7 (4.3%) believing that all the above reasons are a cause for the lack of women in political leadership and only 4(2.5%) respondents citing other reasons for the lack of women in the political arena. This finding reveals the scenario in the political arena and what women have to overcome to attain political leadership. Women candidates in the 2012 Kenyan Elections were compelled to hire private protection and were encouraged by top males in their parties and ethnic groupings not to run for office, according to the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA). Participating in politics, according

to the men, went against traditional gender standards. Female political candidates were kept out of the nomination process and pushed to the sidelines in Kenya's general election of 2012, while men were given priority for leadership.

Further analysis of the responses on reasons for lesser women representation in politics than men revealed that the key issues were limited finances and culture. As one key informant put it:

'Many of the women would make very good political leaders. In fact, women are better because they do not easily take risks like stealing or misusing public funds; however, in my opinion, two key issues affect their ascending to political leadership. First, they have limited resources. Even where they have resources, still they have to seek permission from their husbands if they are married to get involved in political leadership. The husband must be convinced that there will be no problem, particularly those related to maintaining the home' (Key informant-2022).

This finding implies that there are many dimensions to women participation in the political arena. These factors are similar in many parts of the African continent. In most cases women are dependent to their husbands, brothers or fathers and those do not have a right to own or inherit wealth. Although unwritten, informal rules connect cultural, religious, and social structures to exert powerful constraints on women's political agency alongside formal institutions. The findings also supported the findings of Ekpe, Eja, and John (2014), who claimed that women are often sidelined in political involvement since they serve secondary roles in the kitchen while males make the decisions. This suggests that numerous psychosocial prejudices affecting women's levels of representation throughout the political process are to blame for their marginalization in politics.

The other interesting finding was that most women don't trust themselves (73.8%) and that women lack leadership skills (32.6%). These are notions that appear to show some level of ignorance to the modern society in the 21st century. This can still be attributed to gender socialization, because there are few female mentors for women who desire to run for political office, they are typically apprehensive to enter a field they are unfamiliar with. It is also clear from the preceding section of this study that traditional family role orientations are a sociocultural reason. Religion and traditional cultural backgrounds, notably the Muslim religion, which is considered as a conservative religion, are further causes for the paucity of women in politics. As Kamau (2010) points out, these coexist with male dominance and discrimination of women in other forms and platforms, such as political structures and institutions that appear impervious to gender reform, implying that women, particularly Muslim women, continue to have "difficulty penetrating patriarchal decision-making structures and processes of the state and the party," culture, and religion. This indicates that women are still viewed as in charge of the majority of household work, childcare, and gender-specific family obligations. After an interview with one of the key informants, she had this to say;

Culture and lack of respect for women have been a major problem in Western Kenya, but slowly we are overcoming that. We have female politicians who have declared interest in top county jobs, also ignorance among women and fear of violence are factors that have eclipsed female politicians in the past. Some women, already in leadership positions, have also suppressed the voice of budding female politicians. In politics, one has to be aggressive to be noticed and attract support, but women from Kakamega County have been reluctant to participate actively in politics. They must borrow a leaf from the counterparts from other regions. [Nominated Senator Naomi Shiyonga, Kakamega County, Summary note, 2022]

This statement testifies to the fact that, aside from the cultural component, there are still other underlying variables in the gender disparity in politics. From the sentiments of the respondents, it appeared that the people in society have been socialized to believe that men are more suited to leadership, especially in the political arena. Consequently, voters are much more forgiving of male politicians' flaws than women's.

In Kakamega County, women must prove that they are good wives and homemakers before they are elected, including by female voters, as a prerequisite to being a trustworthy political leader. In order to engage in the democratic exercise of political representation, women must overcome such existing impediments.

Access to financial resources and women political leadership in Kakamega County

The study also sought to establish how access to financial resources affected women participation in political leadership. The respondents were asked several questions regarding ownership of property and access to financial resources to facilitate political campaign. The Likert scale questions centered on access to finances for women aspirants and the results of those who agreed with the statement are in Table 5

Table 5: Access to financial resources for women political leadership in Kakamega County (N=152)

Statement	Males (n=92)	Females (n=60)	SD
1. Absence of finance affects equal participation of women with men for political leadership	90 (98%)	57 (97%)	±1.243
2. Women have lost chances to become political leaders in the county because of limited finances	87 (95%)	59 (98%)	±1.733
3. Only a few women have had a chance to enable them have funds to support political campaigns	90 (98%)	58 (96%)	±1.344
4. The cultural underpinnings of property ownership and inheritance make women less accessible to resources required for political campaigns	89 (97%)	59 (98%)	±1.243
5. Property in the home is owned by a man	87 (95%)	57 (97%)	±1.733

Source, Field data (2022)

There wasn't much difference in opinion about the usefulness of finances for political campaign to attain political leadership by women across gender. These can be seen when we determine the standard deviations from the frequencies of responses across gender.

Almost all participants pointed out that the absence of finance affected the equal participation of women (S.D. ±1.243). Political campaigns, media coverage and even printing posters and paraphernalia to market candidates were found to cost much money which most women could not afford. The absence of funds of women candidates meant that the media would not cover the campaigns and grant for airtime as well as coverage of their campaign activities.

Most participants agreed that the number of men in higher offices was more than women because only a few women had been able to have a successful career that enabled them to have funds to support their political activities (S.D. ±1.344). Most of the men who sought political leadership were accomplished entrepreneurs and corporate men, and this made them continue to dominate the political scene.

The key informants pointed out that financial situation were too dire. Most spirants had failed to launch meaningful campaigns for political leadership. The key informants said that finance was required for many uses in political campaigns. The following narrations summarize experiences of some key informants;

'Finance is still a significant challenge to women aspirants as they have to cater for the logistics of their campaigns alone (in most cases) which is very expensive. This makes them not to even hire some of the vital personel such as security personel during their campaigns

(A nominated member of County Assembly).

‘My biggest challenge was financial. The logistics of running for a political office are very costly. I couldn’t afford to hire a campaign manager or security personnel. I was basically doing everything on my own (An aspirant for position of Member of Parliament).

‘I spent a lot of money on correcting damages on my image and my manifesto. People will purposely come to spread falsehood which requires money to repair. Dealing with political propaganda also leads to increased costs. I had to increase caravans to counter the propaganda that had been spread. Not every woman can afford to do this; but even with that expenditure, I still lost in my quest for political leadership (An aspirant for position of Member of Parliament).

The finding reveals that the few number of women running businesses or having successful careers are the ones likely to compete with male candidates for elected public offices.

This finding corroborates with findings of a study by Njonjo (2016) in which he concluded that poverty and unfair distribution of wealth contribute to the inability of women to occupy public positions.

Elections in Kenya have become even more costly for candidates since the introduction of devolution. Campaign financing is a potential barrier for anyone seeking elected office in Kenya. Successful candidates typically require cash, logistical support, transportation, and security. Candidates usually need a vehicle to get to and from their electoral unit (ward, constituency, or county), as well as for fuel and maintenance. A vehicle is especially important for candidates running for county positions because they frequently need to travel long distances, sometimes to remote areas. Furthermore, candidates must be able to afford branded campaign materials such as posters, hats, t-shirts, and kangas (traditional cloths). Experienced candidates in highly competitive political units may also need to commission opposition research and hire campaign management teams. Women cited the financial costs of running a campaign as a major barrier. This affects women disproportionately who do not – as a general rule – have equal access to financial resources as male candidates.

Campaign financing in Kenya therefore contributes to an uneven playing field for political candidates, particularly female candidates. The Kenyan Election Campaign Financing Act of 2013, which limits campaign spending, has not been implemented. As a result, Kenyans seeking political office must spend large sums of money to register and campaign for the nomination, which, if won, necessitates even more funds to successfully campaign for the seat. Candidates are expected to contribute to various local fundraising initiatives, provide various forms of assistance to the electorate, and demonstrate their ability to deliver material improvements to their constituency once elected. Candidates with independent resources or the ability to draw on social resources are preferred because parties provide very little financial support.

Women’s contributions to domestic work and caregiving leave them with little income because they are rarely out to invest and are not supported by the state. These structural and cultural barriers, including those of tradition, limit women’s access to resources and place high demands on their time as gender roles increase their responsibility for care in the home, resulting in vast resource and time deficits that benefit men while limiting women’s opportunities for entry and electoral victory. Gatekeepers and political players, as well as non-political actors such as coworkers and family members, are less likely to urge women to run for office due to the financial costs involved in political campaigns.

This finding is critical, because it is not the case for more female candidates compensating for women’s lack of political confidence, interest, or ambition, but rather about giving them the same chances as men. Countries around the world have begun to implement political finance reforms in order to level the playing field for women and alleviate the financial burden that campaigns frequently represent. Simultaneously,

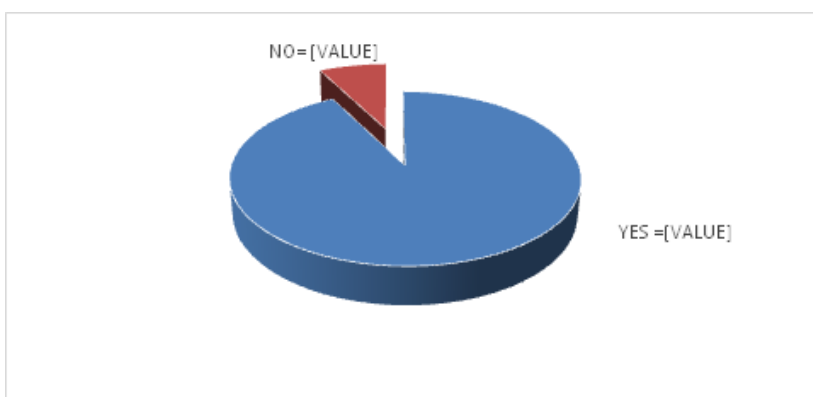
initiatives by electoral stakeholders such as political parties or civil society organizations (CSOs) can help level the electoral playing field by providing funding for women for purposes such as training, capacity building, and fundraising.

As Malik & Courtney (2011) observed, democracy in Africa is not cheap, and much financial injection is required before individuals could be nominated to represent political parties. Without sound financial support, women aspiring to be candidates of political parties might be unable to achieve their objectives as they are likely to lose out to the highest bidders who are likely to be males. Women’s participation in political institutions and electoral bodies such as the Senate, National Assembly, and County Assemblies is directly related to and influenced by access to means of production and finances. Despite being guaranteed by the constitution, most Kenyan communities deny women access to land and property rights. This economically cripples them, preventing them from running successful political campaigns in high-cost states. As a result, women’s discrimination in access to means of production, particularly land and property rights, contributes significantly to their low level of active participation in politics and governance.

According to Afifu (2008), the greatest barrier to women entering elective politics is poverty in rural communities. According to the Census Report (KNBS,2009), there is a significant economic divide in Kenya between urban and rural communities. Kenya’s rural population accounts for 63% of the total, while the urban population accounts for 37%. Furthermore, the majority of women live in rural areas (like Kakamega County), where their access to economic resources is limited in comparison to their urban counterparts. This makes it difficult for them to compete in national or even regional elective politics on an equal footing with men. Thus, economic empowerment of women, bolstered by education and access to information, may ensure women’s full participation in democratic politics.

Effect of policy frameworks on women participation in political leadership

The study also sought to establish how policy frameworks influenced women participation in political leadership. The researcher started by asking respondents on the constitutional on fundamental rights for women participation in political leadership. Respondents were asked if the one third gender rule principle had any impact on women’s participation in political competition. The results are presented in the figure below.



Source Field Data, 2022

Fig.2 Effect of policy frameworks on women participation in political leadership

Respondents interviewed in the study agreed that the Gender Principle has had a positive impact on women’s political participation (92.40%), with some (aspirants) citing the principle as the primary motivator for their decision to run for office. Female respondents said the Gender Principle was an affirmation of women’s political rights, and for some, the security of affirmative action seats mitigated some of the

personal risks associated with campaigning for dual gender seats.

Key informants also agreed that the gender principle had a positive impact on female participation in political leadership. Male key informants perceived the Gender Principle to be a more significant enabler than female Key informants. The male key informants frequently stated that the Gender Principle provided women with an opportunity for 'fair representation.

Female Key informant' opinions were more nuanced, particularly among female contestants for political positions at the National Assembly and the County government. Many of the women Key informants criticized the government for not fully implementing the two-thirds rule.

'Right now, there are very good laws, but we politicize around good laws and pretend to be implementing when we are not,' explained a female representative. (Woman aspirant for National Assembly)

This distinction is notable for two reasons. First, it appears to reflect that some men believe that the current implementation of the Gender Principle is sufficient for women's advancement in representation. Secondly, it implies that women in positions of power find the status quo unsatisfactory.

While the comparative literature views gender quotas as the most powerful legal framework enabler of women's political access, the Gender Principle in Kenya has flaws that make it difficult for women to participate in the National Assembly. Women make up only 19% of the National Assembly and 27% of the Senate, putting both houses below the constitutionally mandated minimum of 33%.

However, the legal framework provide by the constitution is not a perfect solution for ensuring women's representation in all branches of government. There is disagreement about whether or not the two-thirds gender rule should be applied to executive positions such as president and vice president, or governor and deputy governor. While women's representation in legislative bodies has increased, no women were elected as governors in 2013, and only nine women were appointed as deputy governors. As a result, men continue to hold the most powerful positions in Kenya.

Party affiliation and women participation in political competition

Respondents were asked if political parties had helped women access political posts, and under what circumstances. Most respondents (96.7%) identified political parties as enablers to access political positions. The key informants explained that Political parties are generally used to gain access where female political aspirants are members of the dominant political party in the region, both at the county and national levels. But the problem has been that Political parties in Kenya tend to be organized around region and ethnicity, with unclear organizational structures that make them difficult to navigate. Besides, the party structures appear to be difficult to navigate especially for women, as one key informant observed:

'The party affiliation for most women is for them to just act as flower girls. To get a party ticket so that one can vie for an electoral position is usually very difficult. The party leaders are usually men. Women are usually relegated to other positions as branch assistant secretary, branch treasurer, but usually not the party chairperson. This makes it very difficult for women to bargain for party tickets' (Key informant -One Female aspirant in the 2017General Elections)

This finding reveals that despite the various ways in which women can capitalize on party affiliation, the majority of respondents saw parties (and the men who wield power within them) as barriers to women's political representation. Due to the lack of transparency in internal political party processes, even though women hold party positions, party decisions are dependent on patronage and key powerbrokers, who are most often men acting as gatekeepers. These party dynamics manifest differently from county to county and from county to national level. In one gender audit by FIDA, it was concluded that political party selection

was one of the most pivotal factors in the success or failure of women aspirants and candidates during the 2013 elections. Many of the key informants complained that the men are favored during selection with women being promised nominations after elections. These makes the women even more marginalized since they are not seen to be performing by the electorate. This was observed by one key informant:

‘Women who are nominated to national and county legislatures do not have the same benefits, privileges, or development funds as those who are elected. Constituents evaluate the effectiveness of their representatives based on their ability to fund and spearhead development projects. Because most women held nominated seats and did not have the same resources as men, they were perceived to have less power and authority and usefulness as their elected male colleagues.’ (Nominated Female Senator)

These findings corroborate with findings of a study by Bosire, (2017) in which he argued that party leaders’ attitudes support the patriarchal state and that existing party culture serves as a barrier to gender inclusion in party processes. According to Bosire (2017) political parties avoid women, rarely choosing or nominating them as candidates, because ‘male characteristics ‘are emphasized and frequently become the criterion for selecting candidates. There appears to be common manipulation of the nomination process in political parties with the intention of keeping women out of these positions, particularly in major parties. Women are disadvantaged more than men by a lack of political party support and fraudulent party nomination processes

Obstacles to Policy and legal framework

When respondents were asked what they considered as the major obstacle in the policy and legal framework to women attainment of political leadership, 98% pointed at the failure by the national assembly to enforce the two thirds gender rule in parliaments. Participants pointed out the violation of constitutional provisions requiring women to make up at least one-third of the national assembly as the biggest obstacle in the policy and legal framework to women participation in political leadership. This finding corroborates with findings from previous research by Kameri-Mbote (2016), Omondi (2016), and Sivi-Njonjo (2016), who identified a lack of political commitment to enforcing the laws of the land as a hindrance affecting women politicians. According to the participants, there was lack of commitment, particularly with the male members of the national assembly.

This finding is critical because it appears to demotivate willing female aspirants. Despite an increase in the number of women in the national assembly, it was still less than the required one-third quota. This violation of the highest laws of the land could be attributed to a cultural undercurrent that discourages women from participating equally in decision-making, a scenario perpetuated by men (Foulds, 2014).

Thus, the legal framework governing women’s political participation and representation is strong. However, widespread noncompliance with the letter and spirit of the law limits women’s presence and influence in government. The preponderance of women in nominated rather than elected seats suggests a shared desire among all major political parties to weaken the Gender Principle’s transformative potential.

Violence against women

Respondents were asked if they had witnessed any form of violence perpetuated against women aspirants during the electioneering period in the last two general elections (2013 and 2017). The results are presented in Table 6(n=156)

Variable	Male	Female	Totals
Ever witnessed violence against women political aspirants	85	36	121 (77.56%)
Never witnessed violence against women political aspirants	7	28	35 (22.4%)
Totals	92	64	156 (100%)

From table 6, it was observed that majority (77.56%) of the respondents had witnessed some form of violence being perpetuated against a woman aspirant. Most of the respondents who witnessed the violence were men. This could be explained by the fact that women attend few political rallies because of fear of eruption of violence.

All of the Key informants cited the persistence of violence, threats of violence, and verbal abuse as barriers to women running for office and undermining the effectiveness of those in positions of power.

Forms of violence against women

When the respondents were asked to point out the forms of violence against women aspirants they have witnessed, they gave varied answers. Table 6 shows the results of their responses

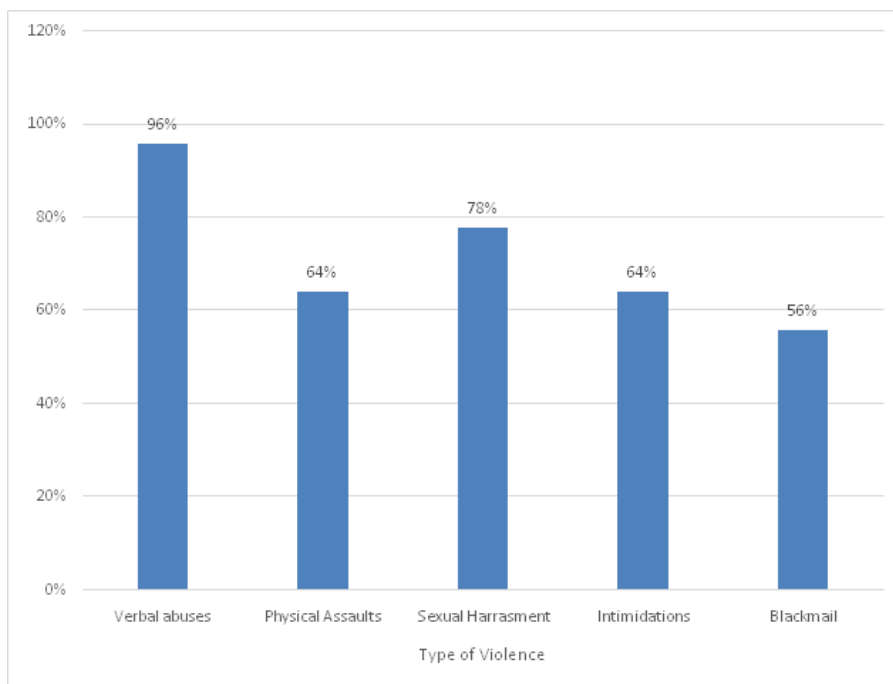


Fig.3: Forms of violence witnessed in political campaigns

It was observed from Fig 3 that the highest form of violence that was prevalent during campaigns was Verbal abuse (96%), followed by sexual Harassment (78%). These findings reveal that campaigns are usually marred with several forms of violence. Violence scares away potential women who would want to participate in political competition. These findings corroborate with findings of a similar study by Bigio and Vogelstein, (2020) in which they argued that women are increasingly reluctant to enter or leave politics due to abuse threats, and violence directed at them.

Participants in the study viewed women and men as having different attributes. The participants 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. As one key informant put it:

For a woman to succeed in campaigns, she must be tough; she must be a person who can fight back when men start abusing her; she must be ready to withstand shameful abuses. Usually, many women aspirants have to hire strong men to provide security during campaigns. (Key informant expression, 2021)

Effects of Political Violence on campaigns by women

When the respondents were asked the effect that violence had on women vying for political leadership positions, a large number of the respondents (83.33%) were of the opinion that political violence reduces women chances of campaigning effectively. These findings concur with findings of a study by Akala (2017) in which he concluded that many female aspirants could not sustain the violence associated with Kenyan politics. One key informant who was a female aspirant in the 2017 general election described the scenario as:

‘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 and being a woman. 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)

Women running for legislative seats at both the national and county levels are usually concerned about violence. Elections in 1992, 1997, and 2007 were marred by widespread violence in various parts of Kenya. Aside from these high-profile violent incidents, candidates and their supporters face routine violence and protests at the local level throughout the campaign cycle.

As one Key informant put it:

‘The prevalence of violence during primaries discourages women from voting and participating in the political process, lowering their chances of securing party nominations. The additional financial resources that many female candidates must expend on security create additional financial difficulties for female candidates. During campaigns, women also reported being subjected to abusive language and insults. They have been accused of being ‘loose women,’ ‘prostitutes,’ and ‘adulterers’ Members of the public, male colleagues, journalists, and others, including other women, scrutinize and criticize the attire of female candidates. As women in political parties, they continue to face widespread allegations of sexual promiscuity, and this abusive language often persists after they take office. (Key informant- A Past election official)

This finding is similar to study findings by Nyabola (2016) in which he concluded that the instrumental use of violence has an impact on inclusive political participation in Kenya. Political leverage at both the national and local levels is frequently derived from the ability to use political violence to intimidate, harass, or attack candidates, politicians, and voters. Political candidates who lack the resources to use violence or who are vulnerable to it, such as women, are disadvantaged and discouraged from running for office.

More often than not, political parties ignore violence against women, perpetuating a culture of impunity and turning violence into a structural barrier to political office that women must overcome. This type of political violence is made more difficult for women by the fact that it is accompanied by widespread misogyny and high rates of gender-based electoral violence. This findings of this study revealed that such violence differs from violence directed at men during the electoral process in that women are targeted to discourage them from running. Then, once in political office, women face on-going violence in a variety of forms. Incumbency has often been cited as a barrier to women’s representation. Women’s representation has frequently been cited as hampered by incumbents.

The idea is that it is more difficult for a candidate to unseat an incumbent, and because the majority of incumbents are men, women have are more disadvantaged (Kerevel and Atkeson, 2013). Because of political violence, 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. Because of the regional pattern of political party support in Kenya, the fiercest competition often occurs at the stage of primary elections. Political party structures are patriarchal, and few have actively sought to increase the number and visibility of women in their ranks.

Globally, violence against women in politics is an issue that is becoming more visible (Krook, 2019), Krook and Restrepo Sann (2019) propose a broad definition of political violence against women that includes physical, psychological, sexual, economic, and semiotic violence. They also argue that violent acts should be distinguished from harassment, which is defined as the creation of a hostile work environment.

Politics in many African countries including Kenya is marred by violence, persecution, intimidation, and torture. While both genders are affected, it poses particular challenges to women’s engagement and political participation. According to the UN (2015), an Afro-barometer survey found that women are “vulnerable to political intimidation and violence.” According to the Afro-barometer survey, 64 percent of women in Guinea, for example, are very concerned about political intimidation. Women and girls are frequently the first to lose their rights to political participation, and livelihood, among other rights that are flagrantly violated.

Cases of abuse, sexual harassment, and blackmail against women MPs have been described in the literature, such as Tamale (2000) describing how women MPs in Uganda face sexual harassment while at work (breast and crotch grabbing by colleagues, for example), or Hazarika (2008) describing a woman in local government in India who was falsely accused by her colleagues of participating in pornography and subjected to a virginity test. Bigio and Vogelstein (2020) provide numerous examples of disproportionate levels of violence and threats aimed at female officials and female politicians, both directly and online, including nearly half of European female politicians being threatened with rape or death and 55 percent of female politicians being threatened with death and 55% of female officials in Cote D’Ivoire, Honduras, Tanzania, and Tunisia were subjected to violence while performing their duties, according to a survey. Krook and Restrepo Sann (2019) point to economic violence and harassment of women politicians, such as the burning of one Indian local councilor’s crops or women (but not men) in Latin American local politics being denied offices, travel expenses, or telephones, as well as semiotic violence, in which women are subjected to humiliation and degrading language.

Mass media influence

The study sought to establish how media influenced the participation of women in Kakamega County in the quest for political leadership.

All the respondents admitted that the media plays a key role in campaigns, particularly in selling the manifesto of political aspirants. However, when the respondents were asked if the media treated men and women aspirants equally, the many respondents disagreed. The results are presented in Table 4.6

Table 7: Media coverage and gender in political campaigns (N=

The Media covers men and women political aspirants equally during campaigns	Yes		No		Total
Male	5	(5%)	87	(95%)	92
Female	1	(3.2%)	63	(96.8%)	64
Totals	6	(3.8%)	150	(96.15%)	156

Source: Field data, 2021

From Table 7, it is observed that a majority (96.15%) of the respondents were of the view that the media did not cover male and female aspirants equally during the campaigns. Both the male and female respondents observed that the media tended to favor male political aspirants when compared to the female aspirants.

One female Key informant had this to say:

In most cases, the media will tend to focus on women's social lives and society expectations when they are supposed to be reporting the political campaign strategies or manifesto of the female aspirants. You will find issue such as marriage life, way of putting on clothes, hairstyles, beauty etc taking a center stage instead of coverage of the political manifesto of the female aspirant. (Female aspirant in the 2017 Election, Key informant, 2021)

Another Key informant felt that the male aspirants as a strategy took advantage to mudsling the female aspirants using their femininity to confuse them when they were presenting their manifesto. The bad thing is that the media would report on the heckling rather than what the candidate said He had this to say:

Usually, the male aspirants will hire 'crooks' who will use vulgar language against women aspirants on the campaign platform. I witnessed a case where no sooner had a female aspirant reached the platform than the crooks started shouting 'prostitute', illegitimate child, husband snatcher; some made comments that the only thing they saw in the aspirant was her beauty; some claimed to know her as a drunkard! This utterances made the aspirant very uncomfortable and confused. She spend more time disputing the sentiments and ended up not articulating her manifesto well. The next day, the media (newspaper) reported that the female aspirant was unable to state what exactly she wanted to achieve for the community (key informant, 2021)

In a society, the media can be extremely powerful information channels. The messages they send have the power to change or reinforce social norms and behaviors, as well as mobilize citizens to take progressive action. While the media should ideally strive for accuracy and impartiality, there are frequently imbalances in coverage, including in terms of women and their perspectives. Women politicians, for example, may be under-represented in the news in the run-up to and after elections.

Gender bias in the amount and type of media coverage politicians receive is an important topic to discuss because modern politics is heavily mediatized and voters rely almost entirely on the media for political information. Disadvantageous media coverage can harm female candidates' electoral chances and jeopardize the political careers of current female politicians. Aside from influencing women's political career prospects and, as a result, directly contributing to women's underrepresentation in politics, media images of men and women politicians are likely to reinforce people's perceptions of politics as a masculine domain. This, in turn, can dampen young women's political ambitions and discourage political parties from selecting women, resulting in continued underrepresentation of women in the future.

Previous research shows that the visibility of political parties or candidates influences voting behavior: when voters are more aware of a party/politician, the party/candidate is deemed more viable by the electorate. In this way, increased visibility of a party and candidate leads to increased vote intentions for that party/candidate (Aaldering et al., 2018). In terms of Election competition, not only is the visibility of politicians in the media important, but so is the manner in which they are discussed. According to research, the tone of the coverage viability coverage (and trait coverage) influences voters' electoral choices (e.g., Aaldering et al., 2018). Furthermore, gender-differentiated coverage can serve to reinforce pre-existing stereotypes and the status of women. Oduol (2011) attributes the low levels of women in politics to a lack of institutional political party structures, which he blames for their limited representation in Parliament and within political parties. Political parties appear to be a Waterloo for increased female representation because

stringent party rules, violence against women, cultural barriers, and other impediments always appear to halt increased female participation in active politics and decision making. Kenya's social cultural beliefs and practices, such as patriarchy and elder veneration, have frequently worked against women's empowerment. As a result, Kenya's extensive commitment to various gender equality protocols has done little to narrow the inequality gap (Nyanjom, 2011).

The gender differences in news visibility may be driven by gender differences in network access. In Kenya as in most countries, political journalism is dominated by men, and journalists keep fixed contact lists and socialize informally with politicians during and after office hours (Aalberg & Strömbäck, 2011). If journalists prefer same-gender (informal) contacts, the male majority of journalists may be more willing to approach a male politician as a source for an article, resulting in men politicians being more visible in the news (see also Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996). Because of this masculine connotation of leadership, and because political functions are perceived as requiring aggressive qualities, journalists may regard male candidates as more viable than female candidates. Because viable candidates are deemed more important to cover due to the news value of power (Bennett, 1990), journalists may pay more attention to male candidates than female candidates in otherwise comparable circumstances.

Because women are stereotypically excluded from public life and politics, there are a slew of expectations regarding personal coverage. The association of women with private lives, physical beauty, and nurturing, supporting roles can be seen in coverage of women politicians' personal backgrounds, physical appearance, marital status, and children (or lack thereof). As a result, findings suggest that female politicians would receive more attention for their personality traits, appearance, and family life. Furthermore, the actual scarcity of women in politics in comparison to men, as well as the stereotypical dissociation between women and politics, can make the fact that a politician is a woman more noticeable to a journalist. As a result, journalists may explicitly mention the gender of a female rather than a man.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that multiple factors contribute to the situation of today where women are underrepresented in political leadership. Women's political involvement, participation and access to formal political power structures are linked to many different structural and functional constraints in Kakamega County. These factors include the predominant patriarchal culture and unfavorable electoral system to women in electoral politics. Additionally, unfriendly rules at formal institutions of political parties, limited access to financial resources for political campaigns for women political aspirants, biases in the selection processes from political party candidates and the media were all an impediment for women political aspirants. These factors do not differ much from those in the developed countries. Karl (2001) reported factors affecting women's political participation worldwide as house-hold status, work related rights (maternity leave, job security, provision of child-care); employment and remuneration; double burden of work; education and literacy; access to financial resources; legal rights; traditions, cultural attitudes and religion; socialization and self-reliance; violence against women; the mass media; health; ability to control fertility. Thus these issues can be summarized as cultural, socioeconomic and political difficulties.

While separating these issues makes analysis easier, when it comes to the issues affecting women's access to political power, the issues interact and overlap. As a result, the issues present a causality question: do cultural elements arrive before socioeconomic, contextual, or political difficulties, or vice versa? Is it necessary, for example, to establish a culture of gender equality before large numbers of women get access to education, legal employment, and economic independence, all of which are key benefits of entering politics? Because such questions remain unanswered, it's probably more useful to assume that cultural, social, and political factors interact to suppress women's election ambitions.

Contrary to these study findings, some authors have argued that women have a low ambition when it comes to political leadership aspirations. According to (Clavero and Galligan, 2005; Coffé and Dilli, 2015; Fox and Lawless, 2014; Fuszara, 2010; Lawless and Fox, 2005; Maddison, 2007), women are less likely to be interested in politics, participate in political activities, or run for political office. There's a problem with the 'supply' of women who want to run for office. But these could be attributed to the prevailing situations where women don't seem to see a way out of the current male dominated political leadership arena. Recent research, however, has cast doubt on this viewpoint. Piscopo and Kenny (2020) postulate that this narrative tends to criticize women for their underrepresentation. They also point out that, while political ambition is more essential in nations like the United States, where candidates are self-starters, political parties generally select who runs in the rest of the globe. They argue that differences in political ambition between men and women are mostly controlled by the political climate and institutions, and that research should continue to focus on structural inequalities and gendered dynamics of candidate emergence. In the case of this study, findings revealed some form of apathy from women, particularly aspirants. Many respondents could only see political leadership for women as coming from nominations and replacement of the deceased husbands.

Several authors agree that women's absence in the political arena also derives from the hindrances related to political, socio-economic, ideological and psychological barriers (Svedova, 1998). Underrepresentation's psychological explanation necessitates socialization and psychological development research. The 'gendered mindset,' a 'deeply entrenched imprint that propels men into politics while relegating women to the margins;' (Lawless and Fox 2010, 12). The current study revealed cases where the women appeared not to have confidence in themselves with findings like most women don't trust themselves (73.8%) and all property in the home belongs to men (97%). Confidence, ambition for achievement, and the desire to self-promote have been significantly reported to be different between men and women. According to the patriarchy theory (Enloe, 2004), male-dominated institutions thrive because women are oblivious of their exclusion from public life. Women should feel 'protected, secure, and cherished,' according to these organizations. Additionally, context is a key motivator of cognition, attitudes, and action, as well as a moderator of interactions between lower-level phenomena, according to (Jones, 2001). Context, at its most basic level, refers to the environment, circumstances, and situations in which leadership and followership take place. Given an environment like that where there is political violence against women political aspirants and biased media coverage against women political aspirants, such environment becomes unfavorable for women aspirants to get political leadership. Navigating such leadership's paradoxes and dilemmas requires an understanding of events from different perspectives. At all levels – individual, group, corporate, and social – leadership is thus influenced by circumstance. Thus, the leadership process is influenced by the environment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that patriarchal culture and the electoral system did not favor women from electoral politics. In addition to unfriendly rules at formal institutions, women political aspirants in Kakamega County had limited access to financial resources for political campaigns and faced biases from political party candidate selection processes and the media. It is important that the government and civil society launch civic education campaigns emphasizing the importance of women's participation in political leadership and representation. The government and civil society organizations should also organize tailored training and capacity building for female candidates on effective strategies for raising funds, as well as effective ways to use those funds. The media should be sensitized on the importance of equality in media coverage, as well as the need to portray women as capable leaders. Finally, the government should enforce electoral laws governing political violence, campaign spending limits, and the conduct of political parties.

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