

Influence of Local Politics on Women Participation in Leadership Positions in Turkana County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Gender inequalities continue to persist, raising concerns among gender advocates about the goodwill and commitment of governments to achieve equality. Women, especially from pastoralist communities, are regarded only as housewives, hence inferior to men. However, some women have emerged and thrived in leadership opportunities, irrespective of this belief. This paper sought to assess the influence of local politics on women's participation in leadership positions in Turkana County. Specifically, the study sought to determine the influence of political factors on women's participation in political leadership in Turkana County. The paper was anchored on The Social Feminist Theory and The Theory of Structural Functionalism, which provided insights on the influence of local politics on women's participation in political leadership. The paper adopted a case study design as a route to investigate the research subject. The target population of the study was 168 women leaders from the county government of Turkana. A sample size of 131 respondents, determined via Krejcie and Morgan's 1970 formula, was used. A questionnaire and interview guide were used as data collection instruments. Data was analyzed quantitatively using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26 and presented in tables and charts, while qualitative data was grouped into common themes. Inferential statistics were used to evaluate the influence of local politics on women's participation in political leadership which had a mean weighted mean of 2.72; indicating a significant influence on women participating in political leadership in Turkana County. The study recommends that more women be encouraged by the county government of Turkana, community actors, and political parties to take part in leadership roles by adopting guidelines that are not discriminatory.

Keywords: Leadership Positions, Local Politics, Women Participation

I. INTRODUCTION

Due to continuous globalization coupled with enhanced consciousness of gender equality, various studies conducted have revealed that participation of women in politics remains relatively low, especially in countries across the Sahara (United Nations, 2019). Salam (2018) noted that women legislators in the United States of America handled more intent issues of education, health, gender violence, women's economic empowerment, peace, rights, dignity, and democracy. Despite this, the 2018 elections presented a new age of the highest record of women elected to Congress through the 'pink wave' platform. This signals a forward stride, as there was a strong compulsion for women to actively participate in politics and public governance. However, structural challenges of party recruitment, campaign funding, and incumbency disadvantage, among other barriers including sexism and prejudice, discourage women from running for political office (Salam, 2018).

Africa has a large difference in women's participation in political matters as compared to men. This continues to undermine prospects for gender equality and shared values when women are seen as equal to men in terms of leadership (Hern, 2017). Nigeria is characterized by acute discrimination and inequality against women, which tend to be amplified in politics with a lack of funds for an effective campaign, violence in politics, poor knowledge of the political terrain, and a societal attitude towards female political activists. These are mostly borne out of the socio-economic environment that leaves women dependent on men (Odebiyi & Iwuagwu, 2018). The participation of women in politics in the country was not proportionate to the 50% population due to party discrimination, a lack of women's support from other sectors, an unhealthy perception of women in politics, and socio-cultural and religious practices (Nwabunkeonye, 2014).

The East African region has continued to experience a political transition and a stark improvement in women's participation in decision-making levels. Four of the six countries in Africa that have achieved the critical mass of 30% or higher are in the region (Hern, 2017). In Uganda, for instance, women have increased in parliament as a result of legislative gender quotas that provide a seat to a woman representative for each district (Anderson, 2019). This legislation has facilitated a steady increase, recording 31% in the eighth parliament and 34.4% in the ninth. Tanzania

has similarly experienced this trajectory with the reservation of special seats in parliament and provisions of affirmative action within political party constitutions. Kairuki (2018), however, argues that even with these working quotas, women who manage to enter politics experience the special seat stigma and a consequent public perception that views their offices as tokens, which leads to general discrimination.

Women represent half of the world population and virtually have an essential role to play in driving sustainable development, productivity, and economic growth. According to UN Women (2019), political observation reveals that political representation by women accounts for a mere 24.3% of all national women parliamentarians, with some chambers accounting for no women at all. While this is an increase from the 11.3% recorded in 1995, the target falls short of the Beijing Platform for Action, which sought to achieve a 30% representation globally (UNDP, 2015). International agreements such as the Beijing Platform have consistently emphasized why it is important for women to equally participate in political leadership. Excluding women's perspectives at all levels of decision-making makes it very difficult to attain equality, peace, and development objectives.

Kenya has continued to fall short of the 30% target despite similar provisions in the constitution. Ten years after the introduction of the 2010 constitution, which provides special seats for women, the country's best representation of women in parliament is the current 10th parliament, accounting for 23% (National Democratic Institute, 2018). Of greater concern is that despite the concept of affirmative action provided for in the constitution, compliance has not been enforced, and while a section of parliamentarians's efforts to ensure its implementation have been made, parliament has failed to enact the legislation that has led to a violation of the constitution and presented grounds to dissolve parliament (Goitom, 2017).

The failure to enact the bill has presented not only a struggle for gender equality but also a rejection of the constitution and principles of democracy. Kaimenyi and Kinya (2013) argue that this resistance to women based on affirmative action has remained a breeding pool for the continuance of discrimination against women. Affirmative action has worked in other jurisprudence in political representation where full commitment is practiced (Hern, 2017). This, therefore, prompts apprehension over the difference in action and achievement, especially in the wake of Kenya growing as a central hub for the region in many key sectors.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Women's full political participation is arguably a matter of human rights, inclusive growth, and sustainable development. Largely, this demonstrates how it has become a key focus in policy, development, and decision-making processes. Efforts by the government to have sufficient representation from all its demographics increase the likelihood of a more comprehensive approach to addressing the issues of its citizens, primarily creating a win-win societal outcome. Nonetheless, women still find themselves grossly underrepresented in parliaments and at key decision-making levels in political circles.

In Africa, representation has had large variations, with countries such as Rwanda recording over 50% while others, such as Morocco, record as low as 5.9% (Musau, 2019). Kenya's terrain further puzzles equality advocates with the existence of affirmative action failing to be enforced, presenting a constitutional crisis that has been tackled by continuous litigation instead of compliance. The lack of urgency and goodwill from top political offices for the need for women to be significantly represented in political leadership has further raised concerns about the government's commitment to achieving gender equality. There is also the issue of non-compliance from the center, which further sets a bad precedent for persons and institutions to respect the constitution and the rule of law.

Turkana County, which is at the center of this study, has constitutional provisions on equal access to resources, including land use, access, and management by women; however, this has remained a challenge due to poverty, cultural barriers, discriminatory traditions, low literacy levels, and inadequate knowledge of existing legal frameworks. Women still fail to appear in peace processes, specifically at the decision-making level. Besides, their role has been recognized only at informal levels, relegating them to a lower status than that of men. It is against this background that this study investigated the determinants of women's participation in political leadership in Turkana County.

1.2 Research Objective

The study sought to determine the influence of political factors on women participation in political leadership in Turkana County.

1.3 Research Question

How have political factors influenced women participation in political leadership in Turkana County?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study will be guided by two theories namely; The Social Feminist Theory and the Structural Functional Theory.

2.1.1 Social Feminist Theory

The study was anchored on the theory of social feminism developed in the late 1960s. The theory argues that there is more than one system of oppression at the heart of women's subordination, which includes social class, economic injustice, race, and nation. According to Napikoski (2019), the theory borrows heavily from Marxism, which recognizes the oppressive structure of capitalist society. From this perspective, the theory recognizes the discrimination of women in a patriarchal society and argues that to address it, you have to consider and deal simultaneously with a number of factors that enable it.

According to Graff (2012), the theory asserts that women have continually been oppressed in all known societies based on the patriarchal economic system, capitalism, the continuing effects of colonization, and other avenues of systemic oppression such as racism. The subordination of women is coherent in that it integrates several aspects of identity, and their realization of this can help liberate them. Napikoski (2019) contends that just like socialists fought to create a more equal society by recognizing the several avenues of oppression, social feminism fights for justice and equality for women in the capitalistic environment.

Contrary to these provisions, there have been critics who have discredited the theory and its provisions. According to Lay and Daley (2007), the theory is simplistic and reductionistic in the sense that the subordination of women is not related to a constellation of other social relationships such as race or class but rather is part of the way the world is designed and structured. Flax (1990) supports this view and argues that oppression is embedded in the socio-economic and political organization of our society. Gender or entity can be on either side. This, however, has been countered by other factions as being pretentious, as it is possible to have a society in which oppressive structures can be changed by political action to create a more balanced society.

The concern here is the comprehension of the root of the determinants that make women desire to engage in political leadership in a world that harbors values and traditions that are gender-insensitive. The theory is relevant to the dependent variable as it helps to determine what influences women in Turkana County to take an active role in political leadership in relation to political, economic, and socio-cultural factors.

2.1.2 Theory of Structural Functionalism

With its history in sociology, the theory of structural functionalism was developed by Talcott Parsons and gained traction in the 1950s, having been built on the work of earlier sociologists such as Emile Durkheim. The theory argues that society is best understood as a complex system with several interdependent parts that work together to promote stability and progression (Lucas, 2007). In essence, this theory views functions as outcomes that benefit the whole society by contributing to its operation.

In the patterning of roles, institutions, and their overall interaction with society, Garner (2019) argues that the individual elements in a society depend on all elements for their maintenance and sustenance as a whole. In this study, the theory of structural functionalism is important as it calls for a social equilibrium where there is a balance in the input of components to maintain the environment. The theory relates to independent variables through its suggestion that both male and female components in a society are key to contributing to the stability of societies. Hence, political participation among women in Turkana County is essential to promoting development and progress and should exist as such regardless of socio-cultural actualities. It calls for the dismantling of the status quo that enables hierarchical structures, which in turn create unstable societies.

2.2 Empirical Review

In a study on the challenges for women's access to higher education in Pakistan, Laiqat (2022) found that early marriages, domestic responsibilities, and poverty were some of the key barriers to them enrolling and sustaining higher education. There is a pattern of similar issues that present obstacles to women in this region. Poverty and gender roles that see men preferred to access education have worked to edge women out and greatly reduce their chances of getting meaningful, high-paying jobs and exposure needed for mobility and skillfulness in politics (UN Women, 2024).

Within the African continent, Murunga (2017) argues that it has continued to fall behind on women's participation in most sectors owing to the societal view on the role and position of women. Additionally, issues specific to the region, such as child marriages, female genital mutilation, pre- and post-funeral practices, and wife

inheritance, have been practiced since ancient times, and a resistance to change these oppressive practices has been countered in the name of eroding cultural norms and demonizing modernization. Arguably, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2021), notes that women cannot wield independent and progressive political influence with these cultural norms in place.

Dibie and Dibie (2012) assert that private and NGO sectors in Africa should be more deliberate in incorporating diversity programs as policy points for their implementation activities with national governments in a bid to engage women in building sustainable development. This would, in turn, see more women engaged in activities and break work ceilings. To further illustrate this, Oyelude and Bamigbola (2012) conducted a study on the strategic roles of NGOs and women's empowerment in Nigeria. Findings revealed that NGOs had gained ground in educating women and creating awareness to be better and stand up for their rights in their different areas. In rural areas, especially, women were found to respond to their activities and be empowered despite the prevailing patriarchal environment. Notably, improving women's socio-economic status through material and postmaterial activities improves their ability to cope and positively contribute to the economy.

A study on the American gender gap in political parties by Barnes and Cassese (2016) further supports the view that leftist parties are more women-friendly by finding that gender differences in policy attitudes are more pronounced in the Republican party than in the Democratic party, with Republican women holding more moderate views than their male counterparts. Further, the study reveals that the Republican Party has a blueprint for the scope of government and attitudes toward gender inequality that polarize most female candidates. As a matter of course, these imply that the quality of representation Republican women may receive from their party is more likely to be less intentional, naturally inclining more women to identify and support Democratic women candidates.

In a study to investigate the factors impeding political participation and representation of women Turkana County, Kivoi (2014) found that political parties are not keen to implement their commitments in their lists of candidates nominated or those to vie in elections and show a lack of political will to address this obstacle. Similarly, in a report dubbed Strengthening the Leadership and Influence of Women in Politics in Turkana County, Bouka (2017) found that parties go against the spirit of the law and their documents as they always prioritize male candidates for elective seats and women for nominated positions. The report also highlights that primary elections at the party stage are designed to keep women off with their highly volatile and violent nature.

Religion has been defined as ideologies that entail the socio-political practices of a society and a guide to shaping behaviors in communities as an outcome of the interpretation of texts. Klingorová and Havlíček (2015) revealed in a study on gender equality and religion that in areas where inhabitants have no religious affiliation, they displayed the lowest levels of gender inequality, while those affiliated with Christianity and Buddhism displayed average levels of inequality, and those that adhered to Islam and Hinduism experienced the highest levels of gender inequality. This could explain why subordination of women in the Middle East and Asia has persisted and even been recorded as one of the worst regions to be a woman, finding justification in religion. Graham-Brown (2001) notes in a commentary on Women and Politics in the Middle East that because of the regional culture, women may be accepted in political roles but in passive and silenced roles. He further notes that male politicians speak of women as subordinates who should only work at home and stay away from politics.

III. METHODOLOGY

The paper investigated the entire population of women in leadership positions in Turkana County who were included, irrespective of their rank. Turkana County had a total of 168 women working in various leadership offices, including 33 in political offices, 30 in civil society organizations, 65 as community leaders, and 40 as other administrators. A stratified sampling technique was used in this study to bring together respondents with the same characteristics. A simple random sampling method was used to select 131 participants from the four cadres, which included women in political office, civil society organizations, community leaders, and other administrators who took part in the study. A case study design was adopted to examine the influence of local politics on women's participation in political leadership.

A structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews were used as instruments of data collection. The questionnaire identified demographic characteristics of age, highest level of education, and duration in office. Participants were assured of complete anonymity and confidentiality by being asked not to put any identification information on the questionnaire. Prior to analysis, the data was examined for response distortions and completion errors using the test and retest method. A pilot test of 10%, with 16 participants, was executed in Samburu County, a location with similar characteristics to standardize the research instruments to ascertain the consistency of participants' comprehension of the questionnaire and to confirm whether all participants interpreted the questions in a uniform

manner to enable adaptation of the study tools. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) while qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Response Rate

In this study, the researcher administered 119 questionnaires to all sampled respondents, who included elected women in the county assembly, women members of civil society organizations, community leaders, and other county government administrators (women). Twelve senior administrators (women) were subjected to interviews by the researcher, bringing the total number of respondents to 131. The instrument return rate is as presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Instrument Return Rate

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Returned questionnaires	116	97.5
Abstained	3	2.5
Total	119	100

The study’s age characteristics revealed key traits of women in political leadership, with the majority (36-40 years) (25%) of respondents holding leadership offices, followed by 41-45 years old (21.5%), then 31-35 years old (19.8%), 45 and above years were next (14.7%), 26-30 years (11.2%), and 18-24 years (7.8%). From these research findings, it is apparent that the majority of respondents were 31 years of age and older, representing more than 80% of the total.

Table 2
Age Distribution of Respondent

Age Group	Frequency	Percent (%)
18-24 years	9	7.8
26-30 years	13	11.2
31-35 years	23	19.8
36-40 years	29	25.0
41-45 years	25	21.5
45 years and above	17	14.7
Total	116	100

The study’s highest level of education provided important characteristics of women in political leadership. The majority of respondents (44.0%) had an undergraduate degree of education, followed by a diploma (36.2%), the KCSE level of education was next (11.2%), and the postgraduate level (8.6%).

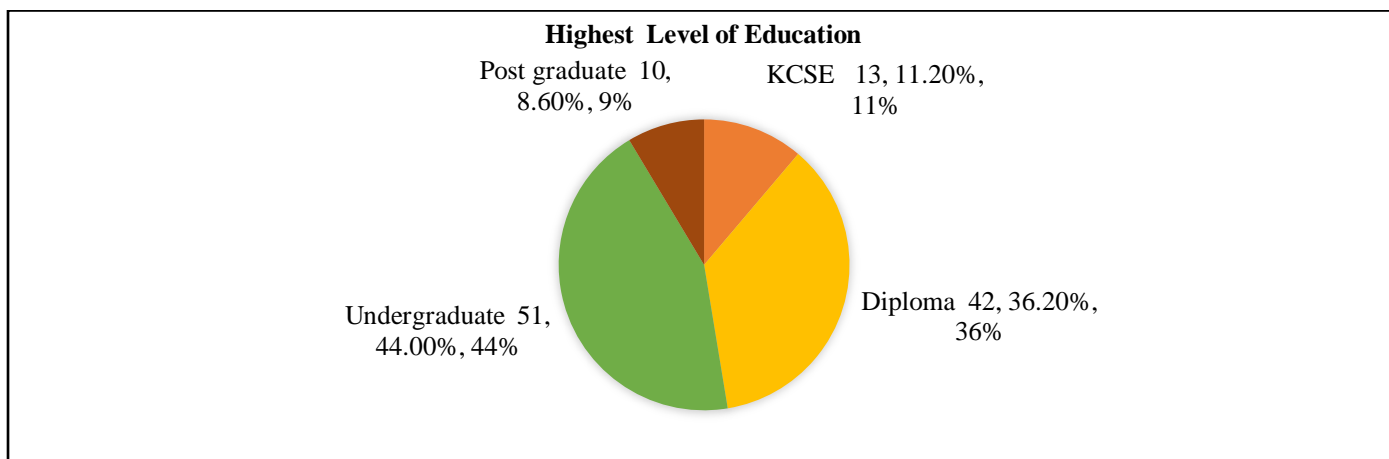


Figure 1
Level of Education

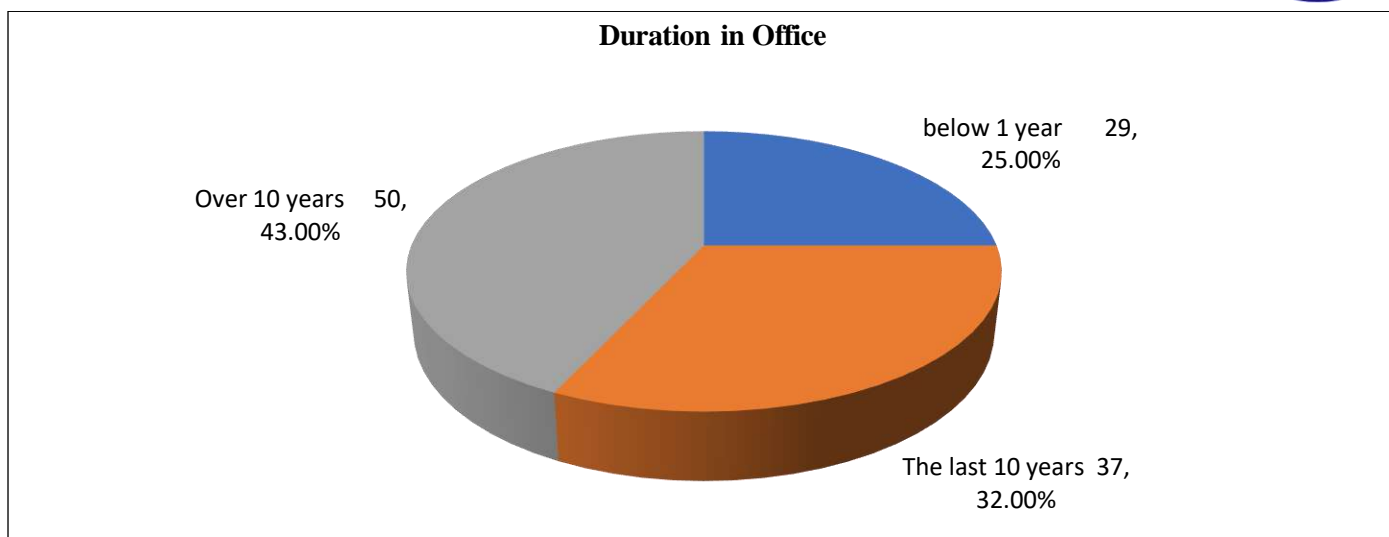


Figure 2
Duration in Office

On the study’s duration in office, results revealed fundamental insights as majority of the respondents had worked in their respective leadership offices for over 10 years with (43.0%). This was followed by those who had been in politics for the last 10 years with (32.0%). Then those who have known politics since birth had (25.0%).

4.1.1 Influence of Local Political Factors on Women Participation in Leadership

The researcher inquired from respondents on the influence of political factors on women participation in leadership in Turkana County. Political parties are important institutions that direct leadership agenda irrespective of gender of leaders. The research findings are as presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3
Influence of Political Factors on Women Participation in Leadership

Influence of Political Parties on Women Participation in Leadership	SD		D		N		A		SA		Mean	Std. Dev.	(N)
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%			
Political parties Turkana County advocate for women leaders	7	6	11	9.5	22	19.0	38	32.8	38	42.8	2.80	1.450	116
After promulgation of the 2010 constitution, more parties have recruited women from the community	6	5.2	13	11.2	20	17.2	37	31.9	40	34.5	2.81	1.472	116
There are active women wings and committees that push for women recruitment in the community	5	4.3	9	7.8	14	12.1	33	28.4	55	47.4	2.26	1.589	116
Women in the community are willing to join and participate in political party activities	6	5.1	10	8.6	19	16.4	45	38.8	36	31.0	3.54	1.578	116
Political parties Turkana County encourages equality	7	6.0	12	10.3	23	19.8	37	31.9	37	31.9	2.23	1.436	116
Political parties Turkana County actively take part in the conduct of public affairs all chosen representatives	5	4.3	12	10.4	20	17.2	39	33.6	40	34.5	2.67	1.567	116
Aggregate Score											2.72	1.524	116

The discussion below was conducted to comprehensively assist one in understanding the complex influence of women's participation in political and ethical leadership. As represented, Table 1 revealed age-related patterns among the respondents. The majority, comprising 36-40 years (25%) of respondents holding leadership offices, was followed by 41-45 years old (21.5%), then 31-35 years old (19.8%), 45 and above years were next (14.7%), 26-30 years

(11.2%), and 18-24 years (7.8%). From these research findings, it is apparent that the majority of respondents were 31 years of age and older, representing more than 8% of the total.

This indicated that women in political leadership were dominated by middle-aged people. The prevalence of middle-aged persons suggests a substantial cohort experienced in the profession, potentially having no difficulties in managing political office. The significant number of younger women in political careers underscores the importance of addressing their specific needs, including career advancement, due to their lack of experience. This result agrees with a study by Chung (2015), who found a significant association between employee age and depressive symptoms, especially among youthful employees who were not in a position to address their specific career progression needs.

From the representation in Figure 1, the results revealed that the majority of respondents (44.0%) had an undergraduate degree of education, followed by a diploma with 36.2%, the KCSE level of education was next with 11.2%, and the postgraduate level was last with 8.6%. The findings of the study concur with those of Cole and Tibby (2013), who found that education qualification, is a key predictor of job performance. It ensures core tasks, constructive behavior, and creativity thrives under minimum educational qualifications. According to Mashigo (2014), consistent application of minimum educational requirements for jobs of similar type and complexity will be difficult to achieve.

As represented in Figure 2, findings indicated duration in office by participants. Results revealed fundamental insights as the majority of the respondents had worked in their respective leadership offices for over 1 year (43.2%). This was followed by those who had been in politics for the last 10 years with (32.8%). Then those who have known politics since birth had 25.0%. Understanding these variations sheds light on how officers perceive and handle adverse working conditions. These results agree with the findings of Adogu (2019), who found out that less experienced officers had different sensitivities to workplace stressors compared to their more tenured counterparts, who possessed coping strategies and resilience. However, it's crucial to recognize that service duration is just one factor influencing officers' perceptions and experiences.

The study results presented in Table 2 revealed a mean of between 2.23 and 3.54 and a standard deviation of 1.436 and 1.589. The study findings reveal that the majority of the respondents 'on Influence of Political Factors on Women's Participation in Leadership had a mean of 2.72 and a standard deviation of 1.524 registered. This means political factors positively influence women's participation in political leadership in Turkana County. Specifically, the study findings reveal that Politics in Turkana County advocate for women leaders with a mean of 2.80 and standard deviation of 1.450 registered; after promulgation of the 2010 constitution, more political parties have recruited women from the community with a mean of 2.81 and a standard deviation of 1.472 registered; there are active women wings and committees that push for women recruitment in the community which had a mean of 2.26 and a standard deviation of 1.589 registered; women in the community are willing to join and participate in political party activities which had a mean of 3.54 and standard deviation of 1.578 registered; political parties in Turkana County encourages equality which had a mean of 2.23 and a standard deviation of 1.436 registered; political parties in Turkana County actively take part in the conduct of public affairs all chosen representatives which a mean of 2.67 and a standard deviation of 1.567 registered.

Generally, the study found that political parties have an influence on women's participation in political leadership in Turkana County, with a weighted mean of 2.72. The findings presented in this study concur with one by Ndirangu (2017), who found out that structural institutions such as political parties are supposed to reflect and be directed to embrace gender equality in their decision-making organs. The study recommends that because women are half the population worldwide, such institutions continue to be grossly underrepresented, presenting a contradiction on the side of their commitment to living up to democratic tenets among countries.

This finding is in line with research by Brechenmacher (2018), who is of the view that improving women's representation in political parties requires instituting mandatory as well as voluntary recruitment targets to be adopted. This is to ensure continuous recruitment of female candidates regardless of party culture, as women are more likely to support gender equality policies and those of social welfare on issues like education and healthcare as they are more liberal than men.

The results in this section contradict a study by Macmillan (2017), who agrees that countries need to have a concrete and glass ceiling for women in political parties where women do not have limitations in ascending to party ranks and are able to cultivate their own political careers, and that there is over-reliance on the in-house wings of political parties in the massive lobbying that has to be done for uptake, which further raises concerns about the general party establishment's commitment to include women in key leadership positions, and this presents a continued challenge for women who have to work extra hard to merge the efforts exerted by their opposite party members. The results also concur with a study by Kandawasvika-Nhundu (2013), who asserts that political party measures and gender equality commitments are in party policy documents like constitutions, manifestos, and strategy documents. Such documents are used as guidelines to meet quotas and improve representation.

4.1.2 Women Participation in Leadership

Respondents were asked to highlight various aspects related to women's involvement in political leadership and community-based development in Turkana County. Respondents from the interviews expressed local perspectives on women's political participation. In this regard, one interview participant pointed out that:

"Women from my area are interested in politics; I know quite a good number of them who have shown interest in contesting for members of parliament, senate and county assembly positions."

This demonstrates active interest and engagement of women in seeking political office despite existing challenges. These findings align with the study by Kandawasvika-Nhundu (2013) that asserts, "58% of the parties have existing expressions of commitments to promote women's participation in their constitutions and manifestos." This indicates a formal recognition within political parties of the need to enhance gender representation in leadership roles. Furthermore, one respondent noted:

"I am proud of majority of community-based groups based in Turkana County for their continued support of women aspiring for political leadership. They have really supported them through trainings on civil education."

The findings in the preceding section illustrate the support mechanisms provided by local organizations to enhance women's capabilities in leadership roles. This corroborates the findings of Ali and Begisen (2017) and Bashir (2019) that highlight the role of community-based organizations in empowering women leaders. The findings affirm that there had been strides in enhancing women participation in the county.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The study found that political parties influence women's participation in political leadership in Turkana County. They facilitate women's engagement in political party activities through recruitment and advocacy for women leaders. Additionally, political parties enable women to participate in public affairs and have established active women's wings to promote women's recruitment in the community. The study recommends that the Turkana County government, community actors, and political parties should encourage more women to take on leadership roles by adopting non-discriminatory guidelines. Furthermore, future research should explore additional objectives to provide further insights into women's participation in political leadership.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that more women should be encouraged to take part in leadership roles through the adoption of guidelines that are not discriminatory to women. Community actors need to encourage more women to actively participate in politics. Political parties should be willing to persuade more women to join and participate in political activities; they should advocate more for women to take part in political matters.

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