

## **Dynamics of Women's Participation in Politics on Governance in the National Assembly of Kenya: a case of the 12th Parliament**

By

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### **Abstract**

Despite achieving autonomy, Kenyan women have constantly faced marginalization in the nation's affairs, leading to insufficient recognition of their desires and aspirations. The 2013 World Youth Report. Although women make up a major portion of the population, their participation in the political sphere in Kenya remains notably insufficient, with an overall engagement rate of 18% reported across time. The current study sought to investigate the influence of women's involvement in politics on governance in Kenya. A descriptive research design was utilized for the investigation. Considering that the purpose of the study was to determine the impact that women's participation in politics has on governance, the selection of this research design was influenced by that objective. The study found that women faced difficulty in obtaining leadership positions within the parties, as indicated by a low mean score of  $\mu=2.3$ . The survey found that the recruitment of women into political parties was not fair, with an average grade of  $\mu=2.48$ . Most female legislators asked believe that the Kenyan constitution supports women's involvement in politics, as well as the two-thirds gender rule, with mean scores of  $\mu=4.35$  and  $\mu=4.0$ , respectively. Affirmative action policies were seen necessary with a mean of  $\mu=4.35$ , while the National Government Affirmative Action Fund was considered useful with a mean of  $\mu=4.09$ . Electing women to political posts was challenging, as shown by a mean of 1.78 and a standard deviation of 0.98. The study concludes that women's involvement in politics has an impact on governance in Kenya. The descriptive data indicate that women's engagement in politics positively impacts transparency and accountability, with an average mean of  $\mu=3.9$ , comparable to 78%. Women MPs had a mean score of 3.87 for enhancing accountability, and a mean score of 3.83 for improving openness in the country's government. The Netherlands Institute of Multiparty Democracy (2019) found that data strongly supports the idea that women's participation in political processes benefits their communities, societies, and promotes peace, stability, and leadership. According to the findings of the study, the Kenya Women Parliamentarian Association (KEWOPA) should take the initiative to review the National Gender Policy in order to reflect new concerns on gender mainstreaming, the sensitization of more women to join political parties, and elective politics. In addition, political parties in Kenya ought to raise the quotas that are established for women members inside the parties in order to ensure that a greater number of women are allowed to join political parties. Female members of parliament who have been elected or nominated ought to give serious consideration to organizing initiatives that encourage more women to enter politics. As a last point of discussion, political parties in Kenya ought to improve the processes of openness and fairness in the nomination process in order to guarantee that women are not subjected to discrimination

**Key words:** Women, Politics, Governance, National Assembly, Kenya, 12th Parliament, Gender

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### **Introduction**

This study intended to determine the impact of women involvement in politics on governance in Kenya, focusing on the 12th National Assembly. A study conducted by Showkat Ahmad Dar (2022) demonstrated that the participation of women in political activities is essential for advancing gender equality. This engagement not only affects the range of legislative issues that are considered but also determines the type of proposed remedies. Whether this phenomenon applies to Kenya is a subject that necessitates additional inquiry. The study aimed to investigate the impact of women's involvement in political parties' activities, pro-women policies and laws, and women's engagement in political representation. The study's theoretical framework was grounded in the Power and Influence Theory. The study utilized a descriptive research methodology that was predominantly quantitative. The study targeted 97 female Parliamentarians that were part of the 12th Parliament of Kenya. The study utilized the technique developed by Kothari and Garg (2014) to determine a suitable sample size of 77 lawmakers from the target population. The data was gathered through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The quantitative raw data collected from the survey was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 22 to provide vital insights about the impact of women's participation in politics on governance in Kenya. The response rate was 89.6%.

### **Background to the Study**

Since the enactment of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action<sup>1</sup> in 1995, women's participation in various aspects of social life in Africa has greatly increased. Nevertheless, there are still enduring disparities in the extent of women's participation in decision-making processes across all levels, as stated by the AfDB and UNECA (2020). The existence of these inequalities can be traced back to unfair laws, societal expectations, and traditional customs that persistently impede women's ability to participate in politics, assume leadership roles, and exercise their agency. The female population comprises almost 50% of the total population, making their active involvement in public and political affairs essential for achieving representative governance. Furthermore, increasing data indicates that the involvement of women in decision-making enhances both governance and political processes AfDB and UNECA (2020).

Political participation is a crucial measure of women's empowerment. Empowerment is enabling individuals who have been deprived of the capacity to make important life decisions to gain this capability. Women empowerment is not only a human right but also essential in a democracy. Governments around the globe are increasingly supporting women ministries, policies and programs, and there seems to be greater appreciation that women are the future of their country's development KIPPRA (2017).

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Women's empowerment began to gain steam in the mid-1970s with the approval of United Nations Resolution 31/136 for the Decade for Women in 1976. The resolution urged governments to guarantee equitable and efficient involvement of women in political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. The approval of this resolution led to the creation of further resolutions and international declarations, such as the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). The United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000 established the foundation for integrating women's empowerment into the global development agenda. Kenya pledged to advance gender equality and empower women under Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3. The progress made was limited to certain areas like as education, non-agricultural jobs, and women's political representation, rather than addressing women's empowerment broadly. An enhancement was made through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 5: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls," which encompasses a wide range of topics and criteria to assess gender equality and women's empowerment thoroughly (UN, 2015).

Data indicates that women are not proportionally represented in decision-making roles globally, and achieving gender equality in political spheres is far, UN Women (2024). As of January 2024, there were 26 countries with 28 women serving as Heads of State and/or Government. Gender parity in senior leadership roles is expected to be attained in 130 years based on the present progression. Women's full participation and leadership in political and public spheres are crucial for attaining the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. According to Inter-Parliamentary Union (2023), Women occupy 36% of parliamentary seats in Latin America and the Caribbean, and represent 32% of legislators in Europe and Northern America. Sub-Saharan Africa has 26% of women legislators, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia has 22%, Oceania has 20%, Central and Southern Asia has 19%, and Northern Africa and Western Asia has 18% of women Members of Parliament.

According to Heinrich Boll Foundation (2020), the increasing global focus on women's representation as a measure of democracy has led to the need for studies on affirmative action, like the Two-Thirds Gender Rule in Kenya. The Two-Third Gender Rule, established with the enactment of the 2010 Kenyan Constitution, has not been implemented due to a persistent lack of quorum in Parliament. Nchalla (2013) contends that the effectiveness of affirmative action relies on the political determination of key figures at local and national levels, as well as the status of constitutional adherence. Additionally, election oversight institutions have the power to either support or obstruct women's significant political involvement. This is because these bodies are responsible for tasks such as distributing election information, determining who is eligible to vote, accepting and verifying nominations, conducting voting, and tallying votes. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, these organizations have played a crucial role in ensuring that elections are conducted in accordance with national health and safety protocols.

In Kenya, women's share of parliamentary seats and participation in politics has grown steadily in the last ten years. The National Assembly members pledged to create a bipartisan strategy to ensure the implementation of the two-thirds gender rule for elective seats, which has been delayed, Parliament of Kenya (2023). This could imply that there is some influence of women participation in politics on how states are governed.

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There are valid reasons to expand the assessment of accomplishments from simple functions like life expectancy to more intricate achievements like political representation. However, it is important to note that these measurements, despite their empirical limitations, involve a shift away from considering women's choices or community values towards defining 'achievement' based on the values of the individuals conducting the assessment.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Women represent the most significant demographic category in Kenya, making up the majority of the Kenyan population. According to a study conducted by KIPPRA in 2017, it is argued that the self-actualization of women is not only a basic human right, but also a vital component in a democratic society. There is a clear and noticeable trend among nations globally to provide greater support for women's agencies, procedures, and projects. The change in viewpoint signifies an increased acknowledgement of the crucial role that women have in advancing the country's economic well-being (KIPPRA, 2017).

Despite achieving autonomy, Kenyan women have constantly faced marginalization in the nation's affairs, leading to insufficient recognition of their desires and aspirations. The 2013 World Youth Report. Although women make up a major portion of the population, their participation in the political sphere in Kenya remains notably insufficient, with an overall engagement rate of 18% reported across time (KEWOPA, 2018). A study conducted by Showkat Ahmad Dar (2022) demonstrated that the participation of women in political activities is essential for advancing gender equality. This engagement not only affects the range of legislative issues that are considered but also determines the type of proposed remedies. Whether this phenomenon applies to Kenya is a subject that necessitates additional inquiry. The current study sought to investigate the influence of women's involvement in politics on governance in Kenya.

### **Research Objectives**

The study was guided by the following general and specific objectives.

#### **General Objective**

The primary aim of this study was to establish the impact of women's involvement in politics on the quality of governance in Kenya.

#### **Specific Objectives of the Study**

The study aimed to determine:

- i. The impact of women's involvement in political parties on good governance in Kenya.
- ii. The impact of pro-women policies and legislations on the quality of governance in Kenya.
- iii. The impact of female involvement in political representation on the quality of governance in Kenya.

### **Review of Related Literature**

As Vice-President, Samia Suluhu Hassan of Tanzania called upon women to advocate for the inclusion of the 50/50 campaign in their political parties' manifestos, in order to secure equal opportunities for women to compete for political positions alongside men in the 2020 elections.

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The Women's Democracy Network-Uganda Chapter (WDN-U) and Innovations for Democratic Engagement and Action (IDEA) performed a study on the early warning signals of violence in Uganda's 2021 elections, as well as the structures and strategies for mitigating the violence. The study identified several obstacles to women's participation, including: (i) electoral violence linked to militaristic narratives; (ii) the objectification and commodification of politics; (iii) intimidation of female candidates; (iv) manipulation of votes WDN-UC (2019).

Women have had a tremendous impact on the political scene of Kenya since the period of colonialism. This development has persisted notwithstanding the nation's largely patriarchal nature and strong opposition to women's participation in politics Kassa (2015). In the colonial era, women played significant roles in the fight for freedom. One example is Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru, who led peaceful protests at great personal risk Kabira (2012). Another example is Priscilla Ingasiani Abwao, who participated in the negotiations that ultimately led to the country's independence Kamau (2010). Colonial and post-colonial regimes acknowledged the influence and authority that women possessed and strategically employed them to achieve their political objectives. In the 1950s, the British government established the "Maendeleo ya Wanawake" organization, which aimed to promote the rise of women in the country. However, Kamau (2010) and Kabira (2012) point out that this group was eventually taken over by the ruling political party to mobilize women for state support.

However, the presence of women in significant government institutions, particularly the national legislature and the Supreme Court, is still below the minimum requirement of one-third representation Kamuru, (2016). Moreover, it is evident that there is a lack of adherence to rules and regulations within the designated roles (cabinet) at the national level. Despite the addition of four extra cabinet positions, the number of women appointed as cabinet secretaries in early 2018 remained the same as in 2013. Only six out of the 22 cabinet secretary positions were filled by women, which is less than one-third of the constitutional requirement Kamaru (2018).

Based on data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2020), 29% of women in Kenya have achieved liberation and are able to actively participate in the social, economic, and political aspects of society. Among these women, 40% reside in urban regions, while 22% live in rural areas. This is further corroborated by the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census, which reveals a significant disparity in economic conditions between rural populations and urban areas in Kenya. The majority of the country's population resides in rural areas, accounting for 68.9% of the total population, while the urban population makes up 31.1% KNBS (2019). Moreover, the majority of women reside in rural areas and have limitations in accessing financial resources compared to their counterparts in urban areas. Furthermore, a mere 23% of women in Kenya are affiliated with the communal enterprises that offer easily obtainable financial resources Wanjala & Odongo, (2010). Typically, this creates challenges for female participants to compete on an equal footing with male candidates in both national and local elections.

Research conducted in Kenyan primary schools by Mburu & Nyagah (2012) illustrates how children are educated into traditional gender roles from a young age. Men are depicted in schoolbooks as being engaged in paid employment and holding leadership positions, whereas women are depicted in the framework of home and family. 8 In Kenya, men wield significant authority, particularly within the household, and have the authority to determine the allocation of resources. This has a significant influence on women's capacity to make judgments regarding topics pertaining to their own life. Women are typically obligated to adhere to, frequently depend

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on the judgments of men, and seek the advice of men prior to making significant life choices Musali (2017).

In 2001, KEWOPA was established as a Legislature Caucus to address the need for increased representation of women in the legislative domain. KEWOPA includes all women Members of Parliament (MPs). The main goals of this initiative are to increase the participation and influence of women Members of Parliament in legislative topics, and to provide greater attention to issues that are relevant to women. Prior to the founding of KEWOPA, a span of forty years elapsed during which the legislative body, primarily consisting of male lawmakers, did not enact any legislation in support of women's rights. Some laws promoting gender equality were repealed in specific cases. Female Members of Parliament (MPs) in the 9th and 10th Parliaments have made significant contributions to the development of laws, guidelines, and legislative bodies within the parliamentary setting. They have collaborated with KEWOPA, women non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and women across the nation to achieve this, despite their small numbers.

The KEWOPA organization played a crucial role in initiating and effectively advocating for the implementation of several important legislative measures. The following laws were enacted to protect various aspects of society: i) the Children's Act of 2002, which aimed to safeguard the rights and well-being of children; ii) the Sexual Offences Act of 2006, which sought to address and combat sexual offenses; iii) the Counter Trafficking in Persons Act of 2010, which aimed to prevent and address human trafficking; iv) the revision of the Employment Act, No. 11 of 2007, which extended the duration of motherhood break to 4 months; and v) the enactment of the anti-FGM Act in 2011, which aimed to combat the harmful practice of female genital mutilation. The individual successfully pushed for tax exemptions on sanitary goods and diapers, as well as increased focus on gender-related issues related to HIV and AIDS. vii) They played a significant role in the modification of the 2008 Standing Orders of The National Assembly, which initially overlooked gender-related issues. viii) They ensure that female Members of Parliament (MPs) are rightfully granted maternity leave along with related benefits, and also campaign for the creation of designated restrooms for women MPs. ix) As a result of their efforts, women MPs were selected as Chairs or Co-Chairs of five out of the 16 standing Parliamentary Committees, which were previously only led by men. In addition, I played a key role in the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Committee (EOC) in 2008. The EOC's primary responsibility is to ensure and support equal opportunities for marginalized groups, including women. The collaboration between KEWOPA members and women groups, particularly women MPs, had a substantial impact on integrating gender perspectives into the process of drafting and implementing the constitution in 2010. By doing so, they demonstrated their ability to develop a gender-focused strategy in Parliament and assertively demand and attain accountability from the government.

### **Patriarchal Systems**

Patriarchy is derived from the Latin term 'Patriarchia', which signifies the dominance or governance of the father. In prevalent discourse, it is predominantly employed to denote the 'dominance of males over females'. More broadly, it encompasses the intricate network of economic, political, social, and religious rules that have enforced male dominance over women throughout history Jones (2000).

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Many societies in Africa and Asia strongly favour having male offspring. Saha & Saha demonstrate the lack of acceptance and respect women face from their husbands' families until they bear a male child. Firdaus in "Woman at Point Zero" observed that if a male child dies, the father will beat the mother, have his supper, and go to bed, whereas the loss of a female child does not result in any violence. Firdaus was physically assaulted due to the male kid's death, attributed to her failure to deliver the anticipated superior standard of healthcare and nurture for the infant. Cain's research supports Firdaus' experience of facing hunger with her mother while her father had plenty to eat during food shortages, highlighting the discrimination against women in South Asia in terms of food and healthcare distribution within families.

Closer home in Kenya for instance, the Ameru Community that resides in Meru County is predominantly a patriarchal society. Kananu (2016) observed that the economic inheritance of land, property, and livestock was patriarchal, with males being seen as the future dads and family leaders, allowing men to exert authority over women. Men have been in charge of organizing and managing the Society since before the colonial era. Patriarchal ideals were evident at birth when the mother would ululate five times to proclaim a boy and three times to announce a girl.

In addition to the power disparity in males and females, patriarchy also influences societal perspectives. Whereas Kenyans support women's involvement in politics, the way in which the public talks about female politicians confines them to home spheres, while men are regarded as public leaders. Factors such as the socio-cultural hierarchy of gender roles that subordinate women to males, patriarchal political parties, the financial expenses of political campaigns, and the prevalence of violence against women, all contribute to the hindrance of women's involvement in politics and public life. This is according to Bouka et al (2019).

## **Methodology**

A descriptive research design was utilized for the investigation. According to Creswell (2014), descriptive study design entails the collection of data that provides an explanation of occurring events, as well as the tabulation, organization, depiction, and explanation of the data. Considering that the purpose of the study was to determine the impact that women's participation in politics has on governance, the selection of this research design was influenced by that objective. In addition, the descriptive research method was appropriate for this study since it helped to eliminate prejudice, ensured the respondents' right to privacy, and made it possible to do research on a bigger sample size, which ultimately led to an increase in the importance of the study.

## **Findings**

The majority of respondents (52%) were inspired to enter politics by other women. 65% of the respondents had political party leadership roles, and 74% were members of several women caucuses in parliament. Political parties have made attempts to promote women in leadership roles within the parties, with a mean of  $\mu=2.96$ . The study found that women faced difficulty in obtaining leadership positions within the parties, as indicated by a low mean score of  $\mu=2.3$ . The survey found that the recruitment of women into political parties was not fair, with an average grade of  $\mu=2.48$ . Most female legislators asked believe that the Kenyan constitution supports women's involvement in politics, as well as the two-thirds gender rule, with mean scores of  $\mu=4.35$  and  $\mu=4.0$ , respectively. Affirmative action policies were seen necessary with a mean of

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$\mu=4.35$ , while the National Government Affirmative Action Fund was considered useful with a mean of  $\mu=4.09$ . Electing women to political posts was challenging, as shown by a mean of 1.78 and a standard deviation of 0.98. Women's odds of being elected into office were low, with a mean of  $\mu=1.9$ . Women's involvement in politics, on average, impacts openness and accountability, with a mean score of  $\mu=3.9$ , comparable to 78%. Women's efforts to enhance accountability and transparency in the country's governance were rated at means of  $\mu=3.87$  and  $\mu=3.83$ , respectively. The service delivery by women legislators had an overall average rating of 3.94, equivalent to 78.74%.

## **Conclusion**

The study concludes that women's involvement in politics has an impact on governance in Kenya. The descriptive data indicate that women's engagement in politics positively impacts transparency and accountability, with an average mean of  $\mu=3.9$ , comparable to 78%. Women MPs had a mean score of 3.87 for enhancing accountability, and a mean score of 3.83 for improving openness in the country's government. The Netherlands Institute of Multiparty Democracy (2019) found that data strongly supports the idea that women's participation in political processes benefits their communities, societies, and promotes peace, stability, and leadership.

The study indicates that women's participation in politics has an impact on service delivery, a crucial component of good governance. The findings show that service delivery by women legislators was scored at a mean of  $\mu=3.94$ , equivalent to 78.74% on average. Women legislators' advocacy of economic development had a mean of  $\mu=3.96$ , which was comparable to the impact of women on resource allocation. The findings align with the United Nations (2018) report, which stated that women's economic well-being improves when they are actively involved in development in countries where they have achieved equality in accessing economic resources, establishing sustainable livelihoods, and gaining leadership opportunities, which are crucial for economic growth. The current study's results support Showkat Ahmad Dar's (2022) conclusions that women's participation in political processes helps advance gender equality. It also affects the range of policy issues being discussed and the type of proposed remedies.

## **Recommendations**

It is possible that providing women with training for public service will be good; nevertheless, in order to achieve gender equality in democracies, it is necessary to do more than simply improve the number of women who hold positions of authority. The transformation of organizations that were built on exclusion is required as a result of this. It entails tackling the deeply underlying impediments that discourage women from engaging in political politics and hamper their success. These obstacles include financial difficulties, unequal obligations for caregiving, gender biases, and violence.

According to the findings of the study, the Kenya Women Parliamentarian Association (KEWOPA) should take the initiative to review the National Gender Policy in order to reflect new concerns on gender mainstreaming, the sensitization of more women to join political parties, and elective politics. In addition, political parties in Kenya ought to raise the quotas that are established for women members inside the parties in order to ensure that a greater number of women are allowed to join political parties. Female members of parliament who have been



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***Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies (JAIS)***: ISSN 2523-6725 (online)

March 2024 Vol. 8, No. 3

**Citation:** Kajuju, F & Muchemi, J. (2024). Dynamics of Women's Participation in Politics on Governance in the National Assembly of Kenya: a case of the 12th Parliament. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 8(3), 5 – 15.

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