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Formal and informal barriers affecting women’s political participation in electoral outcomes in Githunguri constituency – Kenya

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Abstract: Parity democracy remains a challenge globally even among top democracies. The objective of this study was to examine the effect of formal and informal barriers on women’s political participation in electoral outcomes in Githunguri constituency. The study was guided by liberal feminist theory. The study dependent on Mixed methods approach. Questionnaires and interview guides were used as tools for data collection and the unit of analysis was registered voters. Simple random sampling technique was used to sample 330 respondents, 180 males and 150 females in churches, tea buying centers and markets. 15 key informants (KI to K15) were purposively sampled for the interviews, 7 males and 8 females. Inclusion criteria was influential and knowledgeable on constituency affairs of residents who are registered voters. While qualitative data analysis applied thematic analysis with the help of Nvivo program, Quantitative data was done using inferential and descriptive statistics. From the research findings, a coefficient of -0.255 indicates that as the level of institutional barriers increases, women’s political participation and electoral outcomes decreases. Formal barriers include legislative and policy-related issues such as discriminatory electoral laws, inadequate support for female candidates, and insufficient implementation of gender quotas. Informal barriers encompass cultural norms, societal expectations, and gender biases that subtly yet profoundly hinder not just participation but also a win by women who offer their candidature. The study concludes that, formal and informal barriers prevent women from competing on equal footing with their male counterparts leading to underrepresentation in electoral outcomes. The study recommends among others that the National Assembly remodel political strategies and policies to address formal and informal barriers to women’s political participation.

Key words: Democracy, Women’s political participation, formal and informal barriers, electoral outcomes

1.1 Background of the Study

Attainment of gender equality remains a global challenge even with international treaties, conventions and goals that promote women’s rights like the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 5, Beijing

platform for Action, Maputo Protocol etc. Global patterns show that women today still face gender discrimination in public offices (Vu & Pham, 2023). This has been blamed on a number of factors among them prohibitive political and legal framework, cultural practices and societal norms where women are confined to domestic life hence depending on men for nearly every provision making them subservient to men (Vu & Pham, 2023). This confinement makes women to be perceived as incapable of any other role especially in leadership position. This is how gender roles, stereotypes, and bias are established and passed on to subsequent generations.

In the second wave of feminism (1960-1980) feminists fought for increased legal, economic and social rights. Biana (2020) explains that this saw women gain reproductive, legal, labor rights and most importantly adoption of CEDAW as the international Bill of Rights for women by the UN in 1979. (Madsen 2024) explains that the third wave of feminism emerged in the 1990s where men joined the movement as feminists. This wave took the multicultural global feminism approach to address gender equality and identity. The UN Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025 towards women empowerment indicates that advancement in gender equality has been slow. They explain that despite all the advancement globally, women leadership make up only one quarter of all parliamentary seats and only 24 women are head of state or government worldwide. Reporting on the SDG progress through the Gender Snapshot 2022 the UN states that while only 24.6% of parliamentary seats globally were held by women in July 2022, about 23 countries had a representation of below 10%. While praising and attributing this progress to the quota system they lament the current pace of progress stating that at this rate equal representation will not be attained until 2062. According to (Riva, 2023) countries that have attained equal representation have legal and supervisory frameworks in place to develop policies and supervise progress. A country's leadership plays pivotal role in empowering its women politically through creating policies, laws, and structures that promotes a more democratic and inclusive leadership through gender mainstreaming.

On the African continent three countries are among the top ten democracies of the world that have attained gender equality in terms of political representation and they are Rwanda at 63.1%, Namibia at 46.2% and South Africa at 42.7% ranking first, sixth and tenth globally (Rivas, 2023). He explains that the three countries have attained this through an elaborate legislative and supervisory framework. The willingness and contribution of formal institutions in politics plays a pivotal role in promoting electoral outcomes that favor gender inclusivity. Nigeria ranks the lowest of the 54 African countries in elected women's political representation (Lemo, 2023). Despite the huge population, the fastest growing economy in West Africa and the fact that her women are among some of the most educated and holding coveted positions globally Nigeria menfolk have not only failed to recognize the women but also managed to discriminate them from political representation (Okpe et al., 2021). As presently constituted at a pitiable 3.8% representation the women of Nigeria are significantly politically underrepresented in the parliament globally (Lemo, 2023). Okpe et al., 2021 attributes this to a number of factors among them limited resources, restrictive culture, a conservative religion among others.

Closer home, the East African Community Secretariat in 2018 while in Arusha, Tanzania launched the Gender Policy and the aim was to establish inclusivity among communities and guarantee equal opportunities as well as equal rights for all (Songa & Ronceray, 2023). They further explain that the framework adopted involves institutionalizing gender strategies as well as promoting and protecting the rights of men, women, boys and girls on an equal scale.

Women are assigned roles and the expectations are that they fit in and since Jael did not fit in, Kenya's second president Daniel Arap Moi said of her, "*Her ideas, writing, speeches, and even energy did not fit what was expected of a good, proper African woman: one who is silent and subservient; one who is to be seen, yet never to be heard,*" (Angelo, 2023, p. 13). This attitude and perception towards women make them want to conform and so they shy from participating in politics or if they do, they don't conduct a competitive campaign for fear of losing the feminine desirability. The fear of being judged sets them to try and be agreeable even in situations that require assertiveness.

Kenya promulgated the 2010 constitution in August of the same year and part of this constitution reads, "... not more than two-thirds of members of elective positions shall be of the same gender." 15 years later and with gender equality at the center of numerous global and regional policies, the election outcomes don't favor women making it hard to attain the two-third gender rule. In the *Summary Analysis of Women Performance in Kenya's 2022 General elections* the UN Women notes that there was some improvement in women's elections however, the constitutional two-third gender representation for both elective and appointive positions is yet to be realized. The willingness and commitment by the government to attain gender parity is what lacks in most countries including Kenya. The government has not demonstrated willingness and commitment in legislating laws that give provision to the gender rule to ensure none of the genders gets more than two-third representation on the political arena (Thiankolu, 2020). The results for women's political participation in electoral outcomes since 2010 promulgation of the new constitution were in 2013, 2017 and 2022, as follows 5.2%, 6.8%, and 8.44% respectively (IEBC, 2022). For the five-year election cycle electoral outcomes for women's political participation in Githunguri Constituency in 2013, 2017 and 2022 were as follows: 16%, 0% and 33.33% respectively.

Despite sensitization on gender inclusivity and diversity, the rising numbers of women offering their candidature in elections, global funding, rising literacy levels among women and the general freedoms experienced by women today electoral outcomes still leave women underrepresented globally. Similar trends are witnessed in Kenya and more specifically in Githunguri Constituency. Vidiya (2023) reports that the 2022 General Elections saw the first woman, Gathoni Wa Muchomba elected to represent Githunguri Constituency in the position of the Member of National Assembly (MNA). Since 1963 when the first elections were held in Kenya on the basis of universal suffrage, there has been 13 General Elections and one By-Election in Githunguri Constituency, yet this is the first time the voters elected a woman. The women of Githunguri have been underrepresented in the political ranks since independence despite enjoying economic autonomy and a higher literacy level like most Kiambu county residents. Results of the 2021 continuous household survey by KNBS in Kiambu County records it as having the second highest literacy rate in Kenya after Nairobi at 88% and 89% respectively. It is the second richest county in Kenya with an economy of 721.2 billion and a poverty level capped below 20%. Economic empowerment and high literacy level are impetus to promoting gender equality but it seems not to work among the women of Githunguri constituency. Therefore, this research sought to establish the effect of formal and informal barriers on women's political participation in electoral outcomes in Githunguri constituency.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Women's political participation contributes to democracy, peace, economic growth and social justice yet gender disparity in politics remains a global problem (Nguyen, 2021). As explained by Clayton, (2021) women's substantive representation increases legislative attention to matters and policies that interest

women. To drive a substantive gender equality agenda requires at least one-third gender representation which translates to 30%. Past studies have shown that perception that influence women’s marginalization begins at home where women are sometimes excluded from family decision-making process due to cultural beliefs and bias (Kwame, 2023). A study by (Angelo, 2023) found that women who participate in politics pay the price and sometimes it ends in a divorce. In a different study (Nyangweso, 2020) found that religion is a significant agent of social construction used to maintain and regulate social structures which are mainly rooted in patriarchy prohibiting women from participating in leadership roles, but this study did not look at the perceptions of voters towards women leaders. None of these past studies addressed the influence of formal and informal barriers on women’s political participation in electoral outcomes in Githunguri constituency. It is therefore against this background that this research sought to address the research gap on the influence of formal and informal barriers on women’s political participation in electoral outcomes in Githunguri constituency Kiambu County, Kenya.

1.3 Study Objective

The objective of this study was to examine the effect of formal and informal barriers towards women’s political participation in electoral outcomes in Githunguri constituency.

1.4 Justification of the Study

The study sought to examine the influence of formal and informal barriers on women’s political participation in electoral outcomes in Githunguri constituency. Even though great strides have been made over the years, particularly after initiatives that drive the equality agenda through laws and policies, the colossal gender gap in politics is still glaring. While previous studies examined parity of gender and political participation of women, limited knowledge is availed on the influence of formal and informal barriers on women’s political participation in electoral outcomes in Githunguri constituency. By examining how formal and informal barriers hinder women’s political participation gave insights on how social structures like the law, religion and culture impede attainment of parity democracy. Marginalization of women in Kenya and in politics cannot be resolved without a clear understanding of its genesis (Angelo, 2023). Findings of the research provides knowledge and the basis to challenge status quo and systemic barriers through formulation and supervision of the right policies.

1.5 Conceptual Framework

Independent variable

Dependent variable

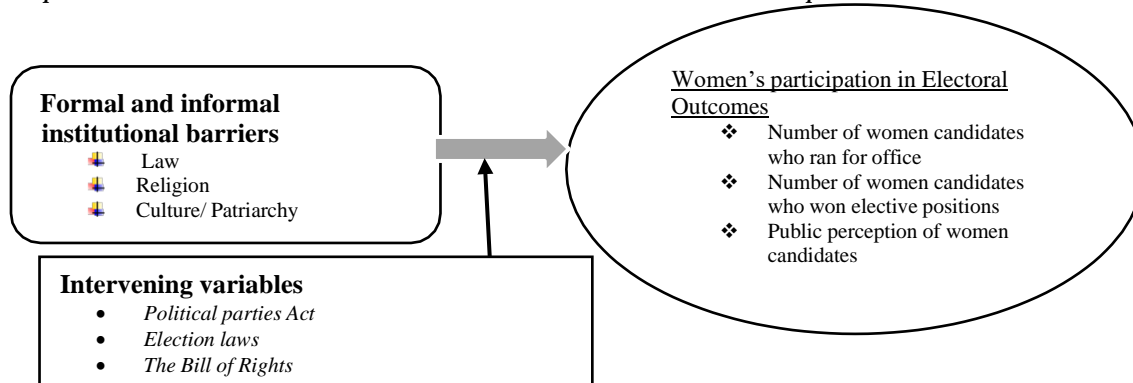


Figure 1: The Conceptual framework
Source: Own Conceptualization, 2024

1.6 Literature review

Literature review in this section includes theoretical and empirical reviews.

1.6.1 Theoretical review

The liberal Feminist Theory

The liberal feminist theory is a branch of the feminist theory that was founded in the 1940s by Betty Friedan (Mohajan, 2022). According to the liberal feminist perspective women are relegated to a lower social standing as a result of deliberate and institutionalized unequal distribution of resources and opportunities to sustain the male dominance and privilege (Mohajan, 2022). The model is used to explain the complexity of discrimination and disparities that arise from the mere fact that one is a woman. It is used to explain the assumption that if given equal opportunity women can succeed where men have succeeded and this sends us to examine the limiting factors that contribute to gender disproportions in electoral outcomes in Githunguri constituency. Mohajan, (2022) explains that its origin is in the first wave feminism, and it focuses on achieving gender equality through social, political and legal reforms within the existing structures of society. It follows a long history of championing for improved rights and opportunities for women where its assumption is that women suffer injustices because of their sex and so it advocates for equality and redistribution. The tenets of Liberal feminist theory include: (a) intersectionality (b) individualism (c) reproductive rights (d) work and economic equality (e) Education, (f) Legal and political reforms and (g) Equality.

As advocates of equality the liberal feminists explain the contribution of patriarchy, culture, and gender roles towards a system of inequality that influences how individual make decisions. They explain how gender perception developed with time as a result of repeated exercising of gender norms and gender role play which relegated women to the periphery. This has contributed immensely towards how different genders are perceived and treated, how women in politics choose their campaign strategies and how the deprivation of women intersects to disadvantage their political participation. Liberal feminist theory advocates for the importance of individualism and self-autonomy by addressing historical and systemic oppression and injustices faced by women within existing structures (Tseer, et al., 2023). This approach has been discredited by Catherine A. MacKinnon an American lawyer, writer, and social activist; she used the categorical discourse to discredit liberal feminism by comparing it to radical feminism. In her judgement she faults the liberal feminist theory in its individualistic approach for taking an individual as a proper unit of analysis and measure towards destructiveness of sexism (Cahill, 2023). According to Catherine the individualistic approach fails to address the depth and strength of male domination. She explains that for radical feminism the basis for analysis and outrage is the collective 'group called women' while the categorical discourse of dominance theory looks at gender as a material division of power.

A study by (Bhandari, 2024) established that Liberal Feminist Theory has been used in the past by researchers and scholars to analyze and address gender inequalities through advocating for policies that promote women's inclusivity and rights leading to gains in reproductive health, bridging gender wage gap and adopting affirmative action. In John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women (1869)*, he asserts that the subordination of women is one of the chief hindrances of not only women's growth but also human progress (Sangeetha, et al., 2022). The Liberal Feminist Theorists believe in using existing legal and political framework to effect change. They work towards enacting and reinforcing laws that protect

women's political rights, for example the Political Party Act 2011 which provides a roadmap on the process of candidate nomination. The theory was used to examine the effect of formal and informal barriers towards women's political participation. Given the strengths of the liberal feminist theory, it was used to examine the formal and informal barriers towards women's political participation and electoral outcomes in Githunguri constituency.

1.6.2 Empirical review

Formal and Informal Barriers in Electoral Outcomes

Cultural beliefs and practices are preserved as (Kyerewaah & Effe, 2022) found out, through transmission of heritage like the emphasis on a woman's primary role as mothers and wife. They define patriarch as the Greek word that means "the rule of the father" where the power rests with the males who rule over the females. Women needed permission from the men in their lives particularly their husbands before they could engage in politics or any public activity. In most instances this permission was not granted like we see in the case of Jael Mbogo who gets divorced by her husband for pursuing her political interests.

Kipnetich et al., (2022) as cited in Kassa (2015) analyzed religion and found that some religious denominations like Islam, Catholic etc. with a hierarchy of leadership have only men at the helm of the leadership hierarchy. He found that the role of the Imam is strictly for Muslim men and in Islam women are not allowed to lead men. In a separate study Memusi (2020) found that religion among the Maasai community impact different groups differently depending on the denomination. For example, while the role of some churches is ambiguous some promote gender equality by preaching men and women being equal in the eyes of God and this makes church going men open to women's influence and contribution. However, there are conservative churches that ride on scripture that teaches women to be quiet and submissive into relegating women at the periphery.

Most social institutions of the world are gendered and the dominant definitions are reinforced, reproduced and protected (Kimmel, 2017). He states that every social institution divides its social economic and political resources unequally between the genders. Some formal institutions don't always seek to disenfranchise women in their pursuit for a political career. In its operationalization of the Elections Act (2012) the IEBC waived the candidate registration fee for women where now women pay half of what men pay for all the elective positions. In addition, IEBC tries as much as possible to regulate activities of political parties to ensure they comply with the gender equality rule. On 5th May 2022 IEBC evaluated the submission of lists of persons nominated by political parties for gender equality compliance. For none compliance the Commission afforded them an opportunity to revise the lists extending the deadline to 9th May 2022 as detailed in the press release dated 9th My 2022. Some resubmitted improved but did not comply, to make the election facilitative as stipulated by the law, IEBC extended the deadline further to 12th May 2022 5.00 pm IEBC - news. (n.d.). This very disenfranchisement by political parties compares to what is mentioned in the introduction about Ruth Habwe's suspension from the ruling party KANU. Research findings by Chirawu (2023) show that access to dominant parties has traditionally predicted the potential for success of a candidates. Reluctance by political parties to sponsor women to parliament the same way the executive refuses to operationalize the two-third gender rule excludes women as explained by (Mwakamba, 2023).

1.7 Research Methods and Design

This study used descriptive explanatory and sequential designs and mixed-method approaches research. The study utilized the pragmatism research philosophy combining positivist and interpretivist perspectives. The site of the study was Githunguri constituency, which is one of the twelve constituencies found in Kiambu County. It is made up of five CAW and covers a total area of 173 km² according to NGCDF (2024). It has a population of 164,939 according to the KNBS's 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census. Githunguri which is peri-urban thrives in business, agriculture and industry with a milk processing plant and a tea processing factory. Most residents are farmers who grow coffee and tea and also keep cattle for commercial purposes. The researcher chose Githunguri because the women of Githunguri have been underrepresented on political decision-making table for a long time. Another reason for choosing Githunguri is, it is a peri-urban settlement making it representative of many constituencies around the country and lastly its high population offers ease of access to the respondents. In this study the target population was the registered voters of Githunguri constituency who according to the 2022 register of voters by IEBC are 104,562. The study population or sample frame was drawn from the target population. For quantitative research 330 respondents with 180 males and 150 females were randomly selected from the registered voters. Qualitative research respondents were 15 key informants with 7 males and 8 females who were purposively sampled. Table 1 shows how the target population which comprise registered voters is distributed across the constituency in order to help understand how many people needed to be sampled from each CAW to ensure proportionality.

Table 1: Distribution of Registered Voters per CAW

Total Number of Registered Voters in Githunguri Constituency as of March 2024

S/NO	NAME OF COUNTY ASSEMBLY WARD	TOTOL NO. OF REGISTERED VOTERS
1	GITHIGA	20,616
2	GITHUNGURI	27,596
3	IKINU	17,450
4	KOMOTHAI	20,054
5	NGEWA	18,876
		104,562

Source: IEBC 2022 Register of Voters

Sample Size and Sampling Procedures

Mugenda & Mugenda (2003) asserts that, when the population under study is more than 10,000 individuals, 384 respondents are recommended as the desired sample size for quantitative research. (Baker, et al., 2012) peak ideal sample size between 12-60 respondents for qualitative research interviews. Sample size for quantitative research was 385 respondents while sample size for qualitative research was peaked at 20 respondents, giving a total of 405 total respondents. Githunguri constituency has a total of 104,562 (IEBC 2022) registered voters and to determine the sample population through

calculation the Yamane formula of desired confidence level of 95% was used. Estimating the sample size for quantitative data collection using the sample size formula and a confidence level of 95%

$$\text{Unlimited population: } n = \frac{z^2 \times \hat{p}(1-\hat{p})}{\epsilon^2}$$

$$\text{Finite population: } n' = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{z^2 \times \hat{p}(1-\hat{p})}{\epsilon^2 N}}$$

Population size (N) 104,592

Confidence level 95% -95 % has a Z score of 1.96

Margin of error 5%

Population proportion 50%

Where z is the corresponding z score of accuracy

ε is the margin of error

N is the population size

ĥ is the population proportion

ĥ = 0.5

z = 1.96

ε = 0.05

n = Sample size

$$n = \frac{z^2 \times \hat{p}(1-\hat{p})}{\epsilon^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.5(1-0.5)}{0.05^2} = 384.16$$

Determination of sample size for each ward was through proportionate stratified random sampling where distribution is done according to proportionate weight in the population (table 2) within the five

county assembly wards (CAW).

Table 2: Sample Size per County Assembly Ward

COUNTY ASSEMBLY WARD (CAW)	POPULATION	PROPORTIONS = CAW TOTALS/TARGET POPULATION	SAMPLE PER CAW = PROPORTIONS*TOTAL TARGET SAMPLE (N) (385)
GITHIGA	20,616	0.1971	76
GITHUNGURI	27,596	0.2639	102
IKINU	17,450	0.1668	64
KOMOTHAI	20,054	0.1917	74
NGEWA	18,876	0.1776	69
TOTAL	104,562	1.00	385

Source: Field data, 2024

Respondents of qualitative data collection were recruited through purposive sampling. The researcher intended to interview 20 key informants but due to data saturation the researcher settled for 15 respondents, 3 from each CAW comprising of 1 male and 2 female politicians, 1 male and 1 female religious leader, 2 female and 1 male business owner, 1 female and 1 male head of *nyumba kumi*, 2 male

members of civil society and 2 female and 1 male policy enforcers. The inclusion criteria for key informants was based on participants who are registered voters, hold positions of influence in the community and are knowledgeable about the community and the residents. The exclusion criteria was based on nonresidence, non-registered voters and participants who do not hold a position of influence and know very little about the community. The simple random sampling technique was used to collect quantitative data based on the register of voters (ROV) targeting farmers at the tea buying centers, the people at the markets and congregations in churches to recruit respondents from Githunguri constituency. Questionnaires were administered to the respondents to collect quantitative data from the respective five CAW in Githunguri constituency. The return response from data collected from the five wards was 330 respondents distributed in the five CAW as follow as follows: Githunguri (82), Githiga (68), Komothai (65) Ikinu (56) and Ngewa (59). Out of the total participants 180 (representing 54.5%) were male, while 150 (accounting for 45.5%) were female.

The researcher disseminated questionnaires to respondents in all the five county assembly wards with the help of assistants who also helped interpret the questions and ethical requirements of the research to respondents who could not read English. Further, interviews were scheduled with key informants after recommendation and confirmation of willingness to participate. While respondents of the questionnaires remained, anonymous interviewees were annotated as K1 to K15 but their real identities were not revealed. No emails, name or phone numbers were captured. The only identification details were gender and CAW of residence to ensure both genders are equally represented and that distribution is done according to proportionate weight of each CAW.

Questionnaires were administered to 385 participants from five county assembly wards of Githunguri constituency. The sampling technique employed was simple random as long as the participants engaged are registered voters. The researcher availed the questionnaires at tea farmers meetings, in churches, at the market. The qualitative research interviews targeted key informants who are considered not only influential but also thought of to have in-depth knowledge of the people and the constituency at large. The sampling technique was done through snow balling and they included politicians who have run for election in the past, members of the civil society, religious leaders, the sub-county employees, leaders of Nyumba kumi and business owners. Efforts to interview the leaders of *Gwatandai* (a religious sect whose teachings are consistent with the kikuyu culture) and the leaders of *Kiama* (the Kikuyu cultural group) were fruitless. These are people who are believed to be custodians of the Kikuyu culture.

The data collected was both quantitative and qualitative in nature and before processing the responses, the completed questionnaires were checked to confirm if they were filled to completion. Data coding was done and the responses were grouped into various categories. Data collected qualitatively was analyzed using thematic analysis by NVivo, while the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 24) was used to enter and analyze quantitative data by calculating the frequencies, mean and standard deviation. Tables and pie charts graphs were utilized for presenting facts, while prose was employed to explain them. Further inferential statistics, (Pearson correlation test) was used to understand the relationship between the variables. The Pearson Correlation was used after conducting a diagnostic which established that the data from both variables met the test assumptions since they follow a normal distribution, have no outliers and a linear relationship was expected.

1.7 Data Analysis, Presentations and Interpretation

Questionnaire Return Rate

The study sampled 385 respondents out of which 330 respondents were able to complete the questionnaires. This forms a response rate of 85.71% displayed in table 3.

Table 3: Response Rate

Questionnaires issued	Frequency	Percentage
Questionnaires filled and returned	330	85.7
Questionnaires not returned	55	14.3
Total	385	100

Source: Field data, 2024

Demographic Characteristics

This section presents descriptive statistics that pertain the respondent’s background information namely gender and CAW.

Table 4 is a presentation of distribution of respondents by gender representation.

Table 4: Gender Representation

Gender	No	Percentage
Male	180	54.5
Female	150	45.5
Total	330	100

Source: Field data, 2024

Formal and Informal Barriers towards Women’s Political Participation in electoral outcomes in Githunguri constituency

The study objective sought to examine formal and informal barriers affecting women’s political participation in electoral outcomes in Githunguri constituency. By differentiating between institutional obstacles and social constraints, this analysis sought to illuminate the multifaceted challenges that female candidates face. Formal barriers include legislative and policy-related issues such as discriminatory electoral laws, inadequate support for female candidates, and insufficient implementation of gender quotas. Informal barriers encompass cultural norms, societal expectations, and gender biases that subtly yet profoundly hinder not just participation but also a win by women who offer their candidature. Participants were required to indicate how much they agree with the research statements in table 5 that sought to examine formal and informal barriers towards women’s political participation in electoral outcomes in Githunguri constituency.

Table 5: Formal and informal barriers towards women’s political participation

Statements	Disagree		Moderate		Agree		Strongly Agree		Mean	Std Dev
	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%		
	Political parties in Githunguri constituency should have a certain percentage of women candidates.	21	6.4	56	17.6	128	38.8	129		
Implementation of gender quotas and	22	6.7	55	16.7	119	36.3	66	20.0	4.02	0.74

other legal measures promoting women's political participation is effective in Githunguri constituency?	1	4	3	1	0	6		0		
Women in Githunguri constituency do not have equal access to political networks and mentorship opportunities as men.	3	9.	5	15.	18	55.	65	19.	3.85	0.71
Violence and harassment during party primaries contribute to lower numbers of women earning a party ticket to vie for elections.	2	7	0	2	3	5	73	7		
	1	3.	4	13.	20	60.		22.	3.64	0.60
	1	3	6	9	0	6		1		
Aggregate mean									3.90	0.68

Source: Field data, 2024

A high percentage (38.8%) agreed, and (37.9%) strongly agreed, that political parties in Githunguri constituency should have a certain percentage of women candidates (Mean = 4.10, Std Dev = 0.74). This indicates strong support for quotas that promote gender equality in politics. Further majority (57.6%) agreed that it was important that the gender quotas and other legal measures are implemented to promote political gender equality in Githunguri constituency (Mean = 4.02, Std Dev = 0.74). This highlights the importance of institutional measures in addressing gender disparities in political representation. The use of genders quotas to supplement the low numbers of elected women may seem like a good idea but according to Chirawu (2023, in as much as it improves the numbers of women participating in politics it has not improved the status of women meaning statistical representation does not always translate to a comprehensive solution to gender inequality in politics. Therefore, as we clamor for ways to attain gender equality it is imperative to put into consideration the notion of substantive equality by CEDAW which consolidates two approaches namely, equality in accessing opportunities and equality of results to achieve real change for women.

A significant number (55.5%) agreed, and 19.7% strongly agreed, that women in Githunguri constituency do not have equal access to political networks and mentorship opportunities as their male counterparts (Mean = 3.85, Std Dev = 0.71). This can stagnate women's political careers and hinder participation. Some respondents however feel women are to blame for their political underrepresentation according to the sentiments seen in the excerpt from K12 illustrated as :-

“The current system favors women a lot yet they do not want to support each other or shed the fear and take up leadership positions. Very few women have founded political parties, they should not expect to be accommodated all the time by men. Also, nowadays if you harass women, you can be jailed, meaning the legal system gives them an enabling environment to pursue politics.” (K12, 2024 - a policy enforcer).

However, sometimes it is not women shortchanging themselves. There are instances when women are not accepted or embraced in the male dominated spaces. They are seen as intruders who need to be bridled or allowed in with conditions. The male dominance is concealed in the sentiments in the excerpt from K3 illustrated as *“women can step up to political participation as long as they ‘understand their place’.”* This observation is consistent with research indicating that deeply rooted cultural norms and traditional beliefs often restrict women's roles in political and public spheres. According to (Memusi,

2020) Maasai women must have *Enkanyit* (respect) for their husband. She further explains that lack of it can lead to physical abuse on the domestic front and shunning, or even curses in the public space. For this reason, women must exercise restraint during disagreements with their spouses even if the husband is the aggressor (Memusi, 2020).

Similar sentiments were expressed by Kenya’s former president Daniel Arap Moi regarding Jael Mbogo. He describes her as a woman who does not fit the description of a good, proper African woman who is silent and subservient, one who is meant to be seen but not to be heard (Angelo, 2023). This brings into perspective how power struggle and dominance morph from being overt or apparent to being covert or concealed. Former president Moi’s sentiments are from the 1960s yet in 2024 it seems very little has changed considering that the leadership of the country cannot operationalize article 27 of the constitution (Constitution of Kenya, 2010) to allow for two-third gender rule to come to force. A significant number (60.6%) agreed, and 22.1% strongly agreed, that efforts to address violence and harassment during party primaries in Githunguri are not adequate (Mean = 3.95, Std Dev = 0.60). This suggests a need for more robust measures to support women in overcoming these barriers. The aggregate mean score for support measures for women’s political participation is 3.91 with a standard deviation of 0.68, indicating general consensus on the importance of addressing these measures.

Table 6: Formal barriers Encountered by Women Vying for Political Leaderships Positions

Statements	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Fairly		Mean	Std Dev
	f	%	f	%	f	%		
	Legal and political institutional frameworks in Githunguri constituency effectively promote women's political participation.	80	24.2	160	48.5	90		
Gender quotas and other legal measures are adequately enforced to ensure women's representation in political processes.	50	15.2	210	63.6	70	21.2	2.06	0.60
Female candidates in Githunguri constituency have equal access as male candidates to financial resources for campaigning.	120	36.4	160	48.5	50	15.2	1.79	0.69
Media coverage of female candidates during elections in Githunguri constituency is equitable and unbiased.	120	36.4	170	51.5	40	12.1	1.76	0.65
Political education and training programs available for women in Githunguri constituency adequately prepare them for political participation.	130	39.4	170	51.5	30	9.1	1.70	0.63
Aggregate mean							1.87	

Source: Field data, 2024

Majority of the sampled voters disagreed that legal and political institutional frameworks in Githunguri constituency effectively promote women's political participation (mean = 2.03, std dev = 0.72). This implies that there is a prevailing perception among respondents that current legal and political institutional setups do not adequately support or encourage women's active involvement in politics in Githunguri constituency. This finding aligns with the fact that political parties today don't suspend women for going for elective positions like they did back in 1964 when the first woman in the post-colonial Kenya offered her candidature (Angelo, 2023). However, they don't make the process facilitative for women. In 2022 even after being afforded extension of the deadline by IEBC for submission of lists of persons nominated by political parties to ensure gender equality compliance no political party registered compliance at the lapse of the third deadline extension (IEBC - news. (n.d.).

Findings indicate that constituents disagreed that gender *quotas and other legal* measures are adequately enforced to ensure women's representation in political processes (mean = 2.06, std dev = 0.60) A mean of 2.06 is neutral and the standard deviation is close to the mean meaning not many respondents agree with the answer. Continued and enhanced efforts are necessary to effectively address both formal and informal obstacles. Both Riva (2023) and Angelo (2023) emphasize the importance of continuous evaluation and refinement of strategies to achieve meaningful progress in gender equality, a sentiment echoed by McCall (2022). This has been instrumental in attainment of democracy parity in Rwanda where there is a legal and supervisory framework that keeps the process in check. Systemic barriers and inadequacies in policy frameworks hinder women's political empowerment in similar contexts (Mwakamba, 2023).

Qualitative data revealed that when gender quotas and legal measures are not effectively enforced, their intended purpose which is to promote gender equality in policy making and leadership leads to incessant underrepresentation of women in elected positions, perpetuating gender disparities in political power. Equal opportunities in leadership roles are crucial in ensuring diverse perspectives and equitable representation in governance as well as creating role models for other women to emulate. These results correspond with study recommendations by Adegbite et al. (2023), which highlight the need for endorsement of policies that aim at enhancing women's roles in politics. Sampled constituents disagreed that female candidates in Githunguri have equal access to financial resources for campaigning compared to male candidates (mean = 1.79, std dev = 0.69). A mean finding of below 2 denotes disagreement by respondents on the the statement and a low std deviation indicates a high number of respondents whose responses are close to the mean. Lack of resources is a major impediment towards women empowerment and sometimes it is a systemic orchestrated move for man to rule over women. Qualitative data confirms this through the excerpt from K4 illustrates the sentiments:-

“Female candidates face a delicate balancing act, needing to demonstrate strength and decisiveness while maintaining an approachable and likable demeanor. If she was not submissive to her husband it will be known when she is seen making purchases especially on property or assets. That means she is full of herself and men will not vote for her.” (K4, 2024 a head of nyumba kumi leader).

On media coverage majority of the respondents disagreed that coverage of women in politics in Githunguri is equitable and objective (mean = 1.76, std dev = 0.65). Qualitative results point out that biased media coverage reinforces stereotypes on female candidates, reducing their overall recognition

among voters which hinder their ability to build a name, recognition and effectively communicate their manifesto and qualifications the excerpt from K14 illustrates the sentiments “*you rarely see women political leaders contributing to debates in parliament or on programs that conduct serious discussions. You only see them during demonstrations or on tiktok.*” Majority of the respondents disagreed that political education and training programs available for women in Githunguri constituency adequately prepares them for political participation (mean = 1.70, std dev = 0.63). Inadequacy of political education and training programs for women in Githunguri constituency reflects broader systemic challenges in ensuring equitable preparation, support and the general good will for women in political roles.

Correlation analysis between formal and informal barriers and women’s political participation and electoral outcomes in Githunguri constituency

To better understand the relationship between formal and informal barriers and women's political participation and electoral outcomes in Githunguri constituency, a correlation analysis was conducted. The table 7 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients, significance levels, and sample sizes for the predictor and dependent variables.

Table 7: Correlation between formal and informal barriers and women's political participation and electoral outcomes

		Women's Political Participation And Electoral Outcomes	
		Formal And Informal Barriers	
Women's Political Participation And Electoral Outcomes	Pearson Correlation	1	-.255**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	330	330
formal and informal barriers	Pearson Correlation	-.255**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	330	330

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Correlation analysis reveals moderate negative correlation between formal and informal barriers and women’s political participation in electoral outcomes in Githunguri Constituency. Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.255 and a significance level of 0.000 indicates that as the level of formal and informal barriers increases, women’s political participation and electoral outcomes tend to decrease. The negative correlation suggests that greater obstacles, whether legal, political or societal are associated with lower levels of political engagement and poorer electoral results for women.

Discussion of the findings

Inferential statistics revealed a moderate negative correlation between formal and informal barriers and women’s political participation and electoral outcomes in Githunguri Constituency, A correlation coefficient of -0.255 and a significance level of 0.000 indicates that as the level of formal and informal barriers increases, participation of women in politics and electoral outcomes tend to decrease. The negative correlation suggests that greater obstacles, whether legal, institutional, or societal, are associated with lower levels of political engagement and poorer electoral results for women. This result aligns with existing literature studies by Dulle, (2020) demonstrate how both formal barriers (such as legal restrictions and lack of institutional support) and informal barriers (such as societal norms and cultural expectations) hinder women's political involvement. These barriers often result in reduced

visibility and fewer opportunities.

A substantial consensus among participants underscores the necessity for political parties to implement mandated gender quotas (Mean = 4.10, Std Dev = 0.74). This strong agreement reflects a broad acknowledgment that gender quotas are a crucial mechanism for increasing female representation in politics. By enforcing a minimum percentage of women candidates, political parties can address gender disparities and foster greater equality. Such quotas are recognized as effective measures to enhance women's participation by diversifying the candidate pool and promoting a more balanced representation (Dahlerup, 2016).

The findings indicate robust support for the quotas and legal frameworks that can boost gender inclusivity in Githunguri constituency (Mean = 4.02, Std Dev = 0.74). This highlights the crucial role that legal frameworks and gender quotas play in advancing women's involvement in politics. Effective application of these measures can significantly reduce barriers and improve women's engagement in political processes. This aligns with Murray's (2018) observation that gender equality laws and quotas are instrumental in enhancing women's political representation.

Descriptive analysis suggests that current efforts to address formal and informal barriers to women's political participation in Githunguri are somewhat satisfactory (Mean = 3.95, Std Dev = 1.60). However, the results also imply that there is considerable scope for improvement. Continued and enhanced efforts are necessary to effectively address both formal and informal obstacles. Angelo, (2023) emphasizes the importance of ongoing evaluation and refinement of strategies to achieve meaningful progress in gender equality, a sentiment echoed by McCall (2022).

Participants reported that women in Githunguri constituency have comparable access to political networks and mentorship opportunities as their male counterparts (Mean = 3.85, Std Dev = 0.71). Despite this, the data suggests that disparities persist, impacting women's effectiveness in political participation. Access to these critical resources is essential for women's political success, and barriers to such access can hinder their engagement and achievements in the political arena (Krook & Norris, 2018). In direct words of Key informant K11, *“limited mentorship and networks contribute to a lack of visibility and recognition for women's leadership potential within political parties, consequently this results in fewer opportunities for women to run for higher office or to be considered for positions of influence where decisions are made”*. These findings tally with study deductions by Akowe, et al., (2024) that political party gender discrimination during position allocation pose an impediment to effective electoral participation by women.

The study highlights that female candidates often face gender-based violence and harassment during their campaigns (Mean = 3.64, Std Dev = 0.60). This finding points to a significant informal barrier that impedes women's political involvement. Ensuring the safety and support of female candidates is vital for improving their political participation. According to Norris and Lovenduski (2023), addressing such informal barriers is crucial for creating a supportive environment for women in politics.

1.8 Conclusion

Formal barriers, such as a porous legal framework, inadequate enforcement of gender quotas, and insufficient finances to conduct a successful campaign prevent women from competing on an equal footing with their male counterparts leading to underrepresentation in electoral outcomes. This has contributed to the slow pace towards actualization of SDG 5 of the vision 2030 among the women of Githunguri constituency.

1.9 Recommendations

The study outcomes indicate that as the level of formal and informal barriers increase, women's political participation and electoral outcomes tend to decrease. Formal barriers, such as inadequate legal frameworks, gendered political parties, insufficient enforcement of gender quotas, and limited finances to conduct a successful campaign prevent women from competing on an equal level with male counterparts leading to underrepresentation in electoral outcomes in Githunguri constituency. Informal barriers like cultural practices are coined around patriarchy which isolates and bars women from participating in leadership positions. It is recommended that Political parties prioritize mentorship programs for women as well as develop innovative approaches to combat unequal distribution of resources. They should also implement the two-third gender rule to ensure both genders are given a chance to represent the party at the ballot. Lastly, a recommendation to the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), other stakeholders and development partners like UNDP to restructure communication in order to create a voter education curriculum that promotes more gender sensitive responses. Understanding the rationale behind gender discrimination, bias and stereotypes applied in decision making during elections helps devise ways to curb conscious and unconscious bias.

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