

# Examining the Impact of Electoral Gender Bias on Women's Participation in Political Leadership: A Case Study of Oyam South County in Northern Uganda

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## Abstract

Women's representation in political leadership has increased throughout the world. Nevertheless, major discrepancies continue to exist, particularly in developing nations where structural and cultural impediments continue to be deeply rooted. Despite the policy frameworks that promote gender equality, women in Uganda still face constraints in accessing higher political roles. This study explored the impact of gender biased electoral systems on women's political engagement and leadership prospects in Oyam South County, Northern Uganda. The study used a combined methodology using both quantitative and qualitative data. For the quantitative data analysis, although 90 respondents were interviewed, one questionnaire was deemed invalid because one respondent was interviewed twice. Therefore, only 89 valid questionnaires were included in the quantitative analysis. The discrepancy between the originally targeted sample and the analysed sample is reflected in the results section. Whereas in qualitative data analysis, 28 out of the targeted 30 respondents were interviewed via key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions. Quantitative data were studied through descriptive statistics, and qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis. The data reveal that women's engagement is much higher at the village level (94%) as compared to the district level (20%), showing a disparity in different levels of governance. The main obstacles include lack of financial resources (25.7%), bad attitudes in the community (15.6%), discrimination based on gender (14.1%) and inadequate logistical support. Additionally, 46% of respondents highlighted that electoral procedures constrain women's chances to govern, with voters, violence and traditional gender roles posing additional hurdles. The study finds that women are active in politics at the grass-roots but are constrained by structural and socio-cultural factors that hinder

their ascendancy to higher political leadership. It needs integrated institutional reforms, financial support systems and ongoing attempts to change public views towards women's political participation.

## Keywords

Gender Bias, Electoral Systems, Women's Political Leadership, Political Participation, Patriarchy

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, women's engagement in political leadership and governance has expanded worldwide, with women holding around 26 percent of parliamentary seats in 2020 ([Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021](#)). But this masked significant regional heterogeneity, especially in Africa, where women's average representation in national parliaments is only 24% ([International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2021](#): p. 9). Recent studies show that although women's political participation in Africa has increased, there are still significant hurdles in terms of candidate recruitment, campaign financing, political party organisation, and access to leadership ([Arriola et al., 2021](#)). East Africa is performing better at 35%, but this is still below the United Nations suggested requirement of 50% for gender parity ([Economic Policy Research Centre \[EPRC\], 2021](#): p. 8). But like many communities in Africa, Uganda is still characterised by patriarchal institutions where cultural norms tend to perpetuate gender roles that harm women and limit their access to leadership posts. [Tripp \(2015\)](#) argues that in post-conflict African countries, institutional and socio-cultural barriers continue to inhibit women's access to political power, notwithstanding formal democratic improvements.

Women accounted for roughly 46% of the elected representatives in the 2016 Ugandan local government elections. But they have not yet had enough representation in the key decision-making posts. For instance, women held 2.6% of district chairperson seats and 13.7% of district speaker positions ([Forum for Women in Democracy \[FOWODE\], 2020](#): p. 39). The Uganda 1995 Constitution and the Local Governments Act ([Government of Uganda, 1997](#)) provide for affirmative action, but cultural biases and local electoral procedures continue to restrict women's political participation, especially in rural places like Oyam South County. The average women's representation at the national level is 35%, but they are still disproportionately underrepresented in rural areas, highlighting the difficulty of attaining equal political involvement. These inequalities are rooted in socially entrenched conventions that associate leadership with masculinity and tend to assign women to subordinate or "feminine" roles.

To attain inclusive democracy, there is a need to address these basic inequities. Political representation should be gender-equal to ensure fair decision-making processes. Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlights the

significance of gender equality and women's empowerment in governance (United Nations, 2015). Similarly, international treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and regional instruments such as the Maputo Protocol call for the removal of barriers to women's participation in political leadership.

This study explored the influence of gender biased electoral systems on women's involvement in political leadership in Oyam South County, Northern Uganda. The main question that guided the study was, "*What is the impact of gender biased voting methodologies on the political representation and leadership prospects for women in Oyam South County?*" This study is meant to contribute to ongoing efforts to assess and eliminate systemic barriers to women's political involvement and to inform policies that promote gender equality in Uganda's political landscape.

Women's participation in political leadership has long been a key focus in Uganda. Historically, women in Uganda played vital roles in political leadership, with notable examples dating back to the pre-colonial period in regions such as Buganda, Ankole, Teso, and Acholi (Tamale, 1999). Although the Uganda Constitution (Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995) and other legal frameworks promoted gender equality, women's representation remained limited, particularly in rural areas such as Oyam South County. The prolonged war during the 1980s had a severe impact on the people of Oyam South County. Women, in particular, bore the brunt of the effects on political leadership, as many men were killed or forced to flee the region. Therefore, the study examined the extent and impact of gender-biased electoral practices on women's political participation in the area.

The study's primary objective was to investigate the barriers to women's political representation in Oyam South County and to assess government and community initiatives that promote gender equality in leadership. It examined cultural, economic, and political factors that restrict women's political participation, including societal expectations that confine women to domestic roles, as highlighted by Hon. Rebecca Kadaga: some women leaders always find it hard to keep time or hit deadlines at the workplace, and this results in poor participation in the decision-making process (Kadaga, 2013: p. 7). Additionally, Shvedova (2005) argues that women continue to have difficulty exercising their rights to participate in electoral processes due to political, socio-economic, cultural, religious, and ideological barriers (p. 250).

The significance of Oyam South County as a case study was underscored by its history of protracted political instability lasting 20 years. Subsequently, women's political participation sharply declined due to the war between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF), which created lasting socio-political and economic scars in the region. The loss of their livelihoods and the increasing societal dependence on men were among the primary challenges women in Oyam South faced in their efforts to move into leadership roles. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2017: p. 8), 45.7% of elected repre-

sentatives in Uganda's local governments were women, which is above the affirmative level (33% according to the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda). However, this figure was considerably lower in Oyam South, where women remained under-represented in key decision-making roles.

In Uganda, a multi-party parliamentary republic, the president appointed key officials and held executive authority. Although 112 district-based seats in Parliament were reserved exclusively for women, cultural prejudices favoured men in electoral outcomes. Due to gender biases in electoral procedures, a substantial gender disparity existed in Oyam South County, with 96% of males and 83% of females serving on executive committees (UBOS, 2017).

The study focused on the five sub-counties of Aber, Kamdini, Loro, Minakulu, and Myene, where cultural norms and the legacy of conflict have significantly influenced women's political involvement. As women were disproportionately impacted by job loss, dependency, and discrimination in leadership roles, this region was selected to demonstrate the long-term effects of conflict on gender roles.

This study aimed to improve the understanding of women's political participation in Uganda, especially in Oyam South County. To support Uganda's broader development objectives, the research sought to propose policy measures that advance gender equality in leadership by analysing systemic issues and government responses. Key factors, including gender-biased electoral processes, cultural constraints, economic obstacles, and community involvement, played a significant role in shaping the study's aims, research questions, literature review, and methodology. The study focused on the following core questions: How did gender-biased electoral practices impact women's representation and leadership opportunities in Oyam South County, and what challenges did women face in engaging with politics?

Although Ugandan women made significant contributions to advocacy, policy-making, and peace initiatives, they remained underrepresented in political leadership, especially in Oyam South County. Structural barriers resulting from cultural biases and a male-dominated electoral system continued to restrict women's ability to participate in leadership roles fully. Agbalajobi (2009) asserted that women in Uganda served as policymakers, peacekeepers, social leaders, political supporters, and advocates for equality and peace. Despite their demonstrated capability and commitment to public service, women were often excluded from decision-making, particularly in influential political positions. When women are excluded from decision-making, outcomes tend to be less comprehensive, as different perspectives and lived experiences are missed, leading to policies and decisions that do not adequately serve diverse groups. This exclusion perpetuates societal inequities, results in a lack of well-rounded leadership, and can hinder progress and innovation in both organizations and governments. To address this issue, the study investigated specific electoral and cultural barriers that limit women's political participation in Oyam South County. The findings aimed to inform strategies for reducing gender prejudice and fostering a more representative and equitable po-

litical environment.

Despite the increasing global recognition of women's potential in political leadership, significant gaps remain in understanding how gender biases in electoral processes hinder women's participation in leadership roles. It is well established that women's political engagement enhances democratic governance, improves responsiveness to diverse community needs, and fosters sustainable development (Chowdhury, 2024). However, structural and systemic obstacles within electoral systems often impede women's full involvement in decision-making. These barriers are even more pronounced in Uganda, especially in regions such as Oyam South County, which has a history of conflict and deeply rooted socio-cultural norms. This study was justified by the need to examine the specific mechanisms through which gender biases are ingrained in electoral systems and disproportionately impact women, thereby reducing their opportunities for political representation and leadership. Focusing on these biases and their effects, the research aimed to provide evidence-based insights into the systemic challenges faced by women, including discriminatory candidate selection processes, limited access to resources, and deeply ingrained cultural stereotypes. The findings contribute to academic discourse and provide policymakers and stakeholders with valuable insights into practical strategies for reforming electoral systems and promoting gender equality in political leadership.

This study is grounded in feminist theory, which provides a valuable lens to analyse the effects of gendered power relations, social norms and institutional structures on women's access to political leadership. Feminists claim that the character of political institutions is often influenced by patriarchal norms that elevate men and restrict the role of women in decision-making. Early feminist theorists such as Wollstonecraft (2004) argued that women should be educated and have equal rights as the basis for political engagement. De Beauvoir (2011) challenged essentialist ideas of womanhood by arguing that gender is a social construct, not a biological reality. Friedan (1963) also challenged conventional notions that limited women to domesticity, noting the systemic obstacles that limit women's public and political activity. These perspectives are especially important in understanding the experiences of women in Oyam South County because societal expectations and cultural norms continue to determine political prospects.

Contemporary feminist scholars have also highlighted the links between gender inequality and political marginalisation. Lorde (1984), Hooks (1984, 2000) and Butler (1990) extended the feminist analysis to focus on how gender connects with other types of marginalisation such as class, ethnicity and social status. Their findings point to the need to look at the nexus of different disadvantages and their effect on women's access to political leadership. Such an interdisciplinary approach is especially pertinent for rural situations where economic limitations, educational gaps, cultural norms and gender discrimination intersect to limit women's political engagement. Furthermore, feminist approaches to governance and political representation demand more inclusive and equitable institutions that

challenge old power structures and enable the meaningful engagement of women in public life.

Feminist approaches question the notion that political institutions are neutral spaces and explore the role of gendered norms on conceptions of power, legitimacy and leadership. For instance, [Standfield \(2019\)](#) shows how institutional practices can reinforce traditional masculine forms of political power, limiting the acknowledgement of women and their participation as legitimate political agents. Feminist methods also argue that to understand these injustices, one must recognise women's lived experiences and the power relations that are involved in knowledge construction ([Ackerly & True, 2010](#); [Harding, 1987](#)). This paper uses feminist theory to analyse the role of election systems, social norms, economic disparities and institutional practices in the political participation of women in Oyam South County based on these findings. The framework provides a critical analysis of the impediments to women's representation and a foundation for formulating ways to improve political participation and gender equality.

## 2. Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-method descriptive cross-sectional research design. Quantitative data were collected from 89 respondents using structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were collected from 28 respondents using interviews and focus group discussions. The participants were political leaders, community members, women activists and municipal officials. Both stratified random and purposive sampling procedures were employed together to ensure representation across groups. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) using SPSS. Qualitative data were analysed thematically to discover recurring patterns and insights. The instruments used for data collection were pre-tested and examined for reliability and validity by experts.

Research tools were pre-tested with eight respondents in Minakulu Training Centre B before data collection for clarity and relevance. The pilot's input led to minor adjustments to the questionnaire and interview guides. Content validity was strengthened by expert evaluation of the research instruments by academic supervisors and gender specialists, and reliability was enhanced through pre-testing and standard training of research assistants. Ethical approval was obtained from the Hekima University College Research Ethics Committee and the Makerere University College of Business and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Approval No. CoBAMS-REC-2024-58). Later, the official clearance was issued by the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of Oyam District. All participants provided written informed consent by signing consent forms and were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

### 2.1. Research Design

The study employed a descriptive cross-sectional research design to analyse the

state of women's participation in political leadership and the impact of gender biased electoral systems in Oyam South County. This design allowed for the collection of data at one point in time; however, it could not establish a causal relationship between the study variables (Bryman, 2008).

The study used a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods for a comprehensive knowledge of the research subject. Quantitative data were obtained using standardised surveys administered to community members and local leaders on the degree and patterns of women's political participation. Qualitative data were gathered using key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to elicit participants' experiences, perspectives and insights on gender bias in the electoral process.

Structured questionnaires, interview guides for key informants, and focus group discussion guides were the main tools for data gathering. These approaches collaborated by integrating the numerical patterns with profound contextual insights, thereby improving the overall trustworthiness and richness of the data (Bryman, 2008).

## 2.2. Population and Sampling

Population, as defined by Bryman (2012), consists of the universe of units from which the sample is to be selected, and a Sample consists of a segment of the population that is selected for investigation (p. 187). The study targeted political leaders, local government officials, women activists, and community members in Oyam South County, as these groups provided relevant insights into electoral processes and gender-based political biases. According to the 2014 National Population and Housing Census, Oyam South County had a total population of 234,747 (UBOS, 2014: p. 30).

The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula for calculating sample size from a finite population:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

where:

- $n$  = sample size;
- $N$  = population size (234,747);
- $e$  = margin of error (0.05).

Substituting the values:

$$n = \frac{234,747}{1 + 234,747(0.05)^2} \approx 400$$

Thus, the estimated sample size was approximately 400 respondents. However, due to time and resource constraints, the study adopted a reduced but manageable sample of 120 respondents. From this, a final working sample of 120 respondents was selected, which was considered sufficient to provide reliable and representative insights for the study.

A combination of probability and non-probability sampling techniques was

employed in the study. Purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique that allows researchers to purposely pick individuals who have the required knowledge and expertise to respond to the research questions (McBurney & White, 2009). Thus, this sampling technique was used to select key informants such as political leaders, political party representatives, gender activists and members of women's community-based organisations who were likely to provide rich, relevant and in-depth information on women's participation in political leadership.

Additional participants were identified by snowball sampling, through recommendations of initial respondents, especially to reach members of grassroots women's organisations and local advocacy groups. This helps investigate populations that may be difficult to identify or reach through conventional sampling approaches (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). Snowball sampling involves finding initial participants who then direct the researcher to more possible participants with appropriate qualities or knowledge (Babbie, 2016). The method proved particularly useful for locating people interested in political activities around gender who would otherwise have been difficult to find. Moreover, a simple random selection technique was employed to pick community members who were active or aware of the local political processes. This helped to minimise bias and to have a wider representation of opinions in the study area.

The study was conducted across the five sub-counties of Oyam South County (Aber, Kamdini, Loro, Minakulu and Myene) to capture differences in political participation and local experiences. The study sought a sample of 120 participants, comprising 90 questionnaire respondents, 24 Focus Group Discussion (FGD) participants from four FGDs, and 6 key informants. Successful contact was made with 117 respondents from the targeted sample. There were 89 valid questionnaire respondents, 24 FGD participants, and 4 key informants. The response rate for the questionnaire was 98.9% (89/90). One questionnaire was omitted from the analysis because the same respondent was interviewed twice. The response rate for the focus group discussions was 100%, whereas the response rate of the key informant interviews was 66.7%, yielding an overall response rate of 97.5%.

The study utilised stratified random sampling, purposive sampling and snowball sampling. To ensure representation throughout the five sub-counties and categories of respondents, stratified random sampling was applied. Political leaders, government officials and civil society players with relevant knowledge of women's political engagement were selected using purposive sampling. Snowball sampling was useful in identifying women activists and members of grass-roots organisations who were not easily found through formal listings. The application of these combined methodologies improved the range of views recorded and the representativeness of the findings in the study area.

### **2.3. Research Site, Data Collection Process, Reliability and Validity of the Instrument and Analysis**

The study was carried out in Oyam South County in Oyam District, Northern

Uganda. The choice of this area was due to the history of conflict and gender imbalances in political leadership. Data was acquired from five sub-counties of Aber, Kamdini, Loro, Minakulu and Myene. Fieldwork was conducted during February–March 2025. The data were collected through quantitative and qualitative methods. Standardised questionnaires were administered to the selected respondents of the study area to gather quantitative data. The questionnaires were open and closed-ended questions to get individual perspectives and measurable data. Qualitative data were collected through key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Structured instructions were utilised for interviewing government leaders, women representatives and community stakeholders. Separate FGDs for men and women were conducted for open discussion and to collect common experiences about election participation and gender bias. The research assistants were trained before data collection, and items were administered in the local language as needed for clarity and cultural appropriateness. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and debriefed before participation.

Data collection instruments were pre-tested in an adjacent sub-county with similar characteristics to the study area to determine reliability, validity and appropriateness. [Creswell \(2014\)](#) suggests that pilot testing allows the researcher to detect possible flaws of the research instruments, adjust the questions, increase clarity and ensure that the instruments adequately address the research objectives before the main data collection process (p. 151). Feedback from the pilot study helped identify the necessary improvements to the language, timing, and overall structure of the research instruments to improve clarity, consistency, and relevance. According to [Amin \(2005\)](#), an instrument is legitimate if it measures what it is designed to measure and delivers meaningful, accurate and relevant data for the study objectives. Content validity of this study was obtained by expert assessment by academic and gender experts at Makerere University (CoBAMS). As noted by [Patton \(2002\)](#), triangulation of data sources and research methods was also used to enhance the reliability and trustworthiness of the findings (pp. 247–248). The process improved the accuracy, consistency and overall trustworthiness of the study's conclusions.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse quantitative data. Data were coded, entered and analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) presented in tables and figures. The qualitative data collected from the interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and analysed thematically. Responses were coded into emergent themes that indicated participants' perspectives on gender bias in elections. Anonymised quotes were used to illustrate key findings. The quantitative results reported in this study are based on the perspectives and observations of respondents about women's participation in political leadership and barriers to such participation, unless otherwise noted. This survey was aimed at capturing community perceptions on women's political representation, not to offer official figures on elected positions or administrative records. These perceptions were supported by qualitative evidence gath-

ered through key informant interviews and focus group discussions.

### 3. Results

The presentation of the findings is structured as follows: 1) socio-demographic characteristics of the participants; 2) extent of women's participation in political leadership; 3) nature and impact of gender bias in electoral systems; and 4) key barriers and enabling factors influencing women's political leadership in Oyam South County. Several questionnaire items allowed respondents to select more than one response option. These included questions on women's leadership responsibilities (**Figure 2**), factors associated with gender bias in electoral systems (**Table 4**), obstacles to women's political participation (**Table 5**), proposed improvements (**Table 6**), public perceptions of women leaders (**Table 7**), factors enabling women's political participation (**Figure 6**), and government initiatives supporting women's participation (**Table 8**). For these multiple-response questions, percentages were calculated based on the total number of responses recorded rather than the total number of respondents ( $n = 89$ ). Consequently, the percentages presented in these tables and figures may not sum to 100%, as individual respondents were permitted to select more than one response category. For single-response questions, percentages were calculated using the total number of valid questionnaire respondents ( $n = 89$ ) as the denominator.

#### 3.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are divided into eight (8) categories in **Table 1**. The majority of participants were middle-aged, with the largest proportion aged 46 - 50 years (21.3%), followed by those aged 41 - 45 years (19.1%). Younger respondents aged 18 - 24 years were the least represented (5.6%). In terms of gender, women constituted the majority of the sample, accounting for 65.2% (58 respondents), while men accounted for 34.8% (31 respondents). Most respondents were married (73%), with a significant proportion having been married for more than 10 years (52.8%). Regarding education, the majority of respondents (58.4%) had only primary-level education, while 23.6% had attained secondary (O-level) education. Only a small proportion had a tertiary education (10.1%), and very few (1.1%) had completed advanced secondary education. In terms of occupation, most respondents were peasant farmers (69.7%), followed by those engaged in business (20.2%). The majority of respondents (93.3%) belonged to the Lango tribe. Additionally, most participants (69.7%) had lived in Oyam for over 31 years. Finally, 37.1% of respondents reported holding a leadership position, while 62.9% indicated that they had never held any leadership role.

#### 3.2. Women's Involvement in Political Leadership

##### 3.2.1. Participation in Political Leadership at the District Level

As shown in **Figure 1**, the majority of respondents (80%,  $n = 71$ ) perceived that

women have limited representation in political leadership at the district level, whereas 20% (n = 18) perceived women to hold such a position. These findings indicate a low level of women's representation in higher political positions and reflect community perceptions rather than the official district leadership records.

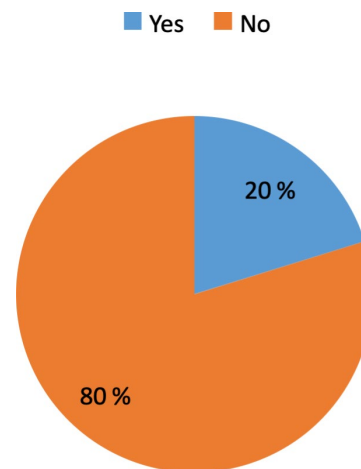
**Table 1.** The socio-demographic characteristics of participants.

| Characteristic     | Category                   | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------|----------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Age group          | 18 - 24 years              | 5             | 5.6            |
|                    | 25 - 30 years              | 10            | 11.2           |
|                    | 31 - 35 years              | 17            | 19.1           |
|                    | 36 - 40 years              | 13            | 14.6           |
|                    | 41 - 45 years              | 17            | 19.1           |
|                    | 46 - 50 years              | 19            | 21.3           |
|                    | 51 years and above         | 8             | 9.0            |
| Gender             | Male                       | 31            | 34.8           |
|                    | Female                     | 58            | 65.2           |
| Marital status     | Never married              | 3             | 3.4            |
|                    | Married                    | 65            | 73.0           |
|                    | Cohabiting/living together | 1             | 1.1            |
|                    | Separated/divorced         | 14            | 15.7           |
|                    | Others                     | 6             | 6.7            |
| Years in marriage  | Less than 1 year           | 7             | 7.8            |
|                    | 1 - 4 years                | 2             | 2.2            |
|                    | 5 - 9 years                | 28            | 31.4           |
|                    | 10 years and above         | 47            | 52.8           |
|                    | Don't know                 | 5             | 5.6            |
| Level of education | None                       | 4             | 4.5            |
|                    | Primary                    | 52            | 58.4           |
|                    | Secondary (O-Level)        | 21            | 23.6           |
|                    | Secondary (A-Level)        | 1             | 1.1            |
|                    | Vocational/technical       | 2             | 2.3            |
|                    | Tertiary                   | 9             | 10.1           |
| Occupation         | Peasant farmer             | 62            | 69.7           |
|                    | Business                   | 18            | 20.2           |
|                    | Others                     | 9             | 10.1           |
| Tribe              | Lango                      | 83            | 93.3           |
|                    | Acholi                     | 3             | 3.4            |
|                    | Others                     | 3             | 3.4            |

## Continued

|                                   |                    |    |      |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|----|------|
| <b>Length of stay in Oyam</b>     | 10 years and below | 9  | 10.1 |
|                                   | 11 - 20 years      | 6  | 6.7  |
|                                   | 21 - 30 years      | 12 | 13.4 |
|                                   | 31 years and above | 62 | 69.7 |
| <b>Held a leadership position</b> | Yes                | 33 | 37.1 |
|                                   | No                 | 56 | 62.9 |

Source: Field data (2025).



**Figure 1.** Participation in political leadership at the district level.

### 3.2.2. Participation in Political Leadership at the Local Level (Village) Level

As shown in **Table 2**, the majority of respondents (94.4%,  $n = 84$ ) reported that women participate in political leadership at the local level, while a small proportion (5.6%,  $n = 5$ ) indicated no participation. These findings indicate a high level of women's involvement in local-level political leadership.

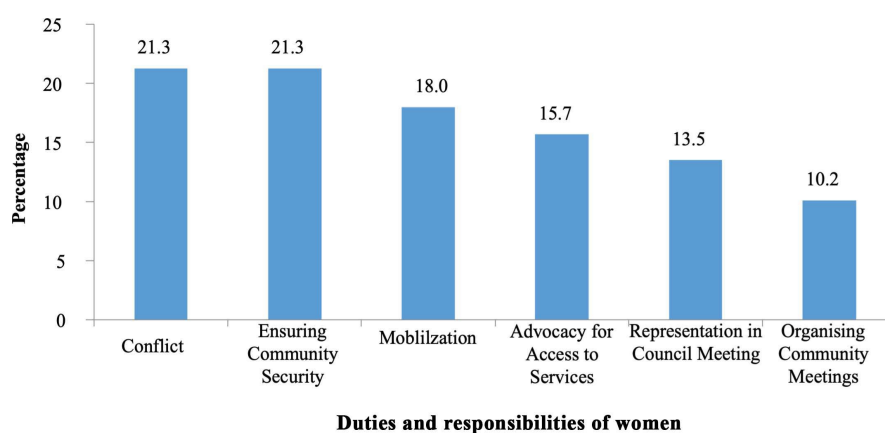
**Table 2.** Women's participation in political leadership at the local/village level.

| Response     | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| Yes          | 84            | 94.4           |
| No           | 5             | 5.6            |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>89</b>     | <b>100.0</b>   |

### 3.2.3. Duties and Responsibilities of Women during Political Leadership

As shown in **Figure 2**, conflict resolution was identified as a key responsibility of women in political leadership, reported by 21.3% ( $n = 19$ ) of respondents. Ensuring community security was reported at the same level (21.3%,  $n = 19$ ). Mobilisation was identified by 18.0% ( $n = 16$ ) of respondents, while advocacy for access to services was reported by 15.7% ( $n = 14$ ). Representation in council meetings accounted for 13.5% ( $n = 12$ ), and organising community meetings was reported by

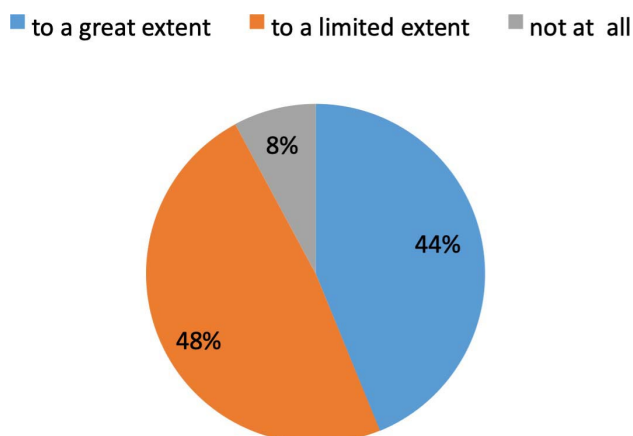
10.2% (n = 9). These findings indicate that women's leadership roles are primarily concentrated in community-level functions, including conflict management, mobilisation, service advocacy, and representation.



**Figure 2.** Duties and responsibilities of women during political leadership.

### 3.2.4. Extent to Which Women Fulfil Duties and Responsibilities in Political Leadership

**Figure 3** shows that 48% (n = 43) of respondents indicated that women fulfil their duties and responsibilities to a limited extent. A further 44% (n = 39) reported that women perform their roles to a greater extent, while 8% (n = 7) indicated that women do not fulfil these responsibilities.



**Figure 3.** The extent to which women fulfil duties and responsibilities in political leadership.

### 3.2.5. Reasons Why Women Join Political Leadership in Oyam South County

**Table 3** presents respondents' views on the reasons motivating women to engage in political leadership, categorised by the extent to which these roles are fulfilled. The desire to serve the community was identified as a key motivator, with 50.0% (n = 45) of respondents indicating that women fulfil this role to a great extent, while 45.3% (n = 40) reported fulfilment to a limited extent and 4.7% (n = 4) in-

dedicated no fulfilment. Promoting development was another major factor, with 52.9% (n = 47) reporting that women contribute to this role to a great extent, compared to 38.2% (n = 34) who indicated limited contribution and 8.8% (n = 8) who reported none. The desire for recognition and respect was also prominent, with 54.5% (n = 49) of respondents indicating that women engage in political leadership to a great extent for this reason, while 36.4% (n = 32) reported limited influence and 9.1% (n = 8) reported no influence. Other contributing factors include inspiration from a political background (50.0%, n = 45), employment opportunities (41.6%, n = 37), and the need to unite communities (45.0%, n = 40), though these were more frequently reported as being fulfilled to a limited extent. Factors such as addressing leadership gaps (34.6%, n = 31), seeking connections to power holders (41.2%, n = 37), and pressure or requests from the community (32.0%, n = 28) were also identified, but with varying levels of influence. Overall, the findings indicate that women's participation in political leadership is driven by a combination of community-oriented, personal, and socio-economic motivations.

**Table 3.** Reasons why women join political leadership in Oyam South County.

| Reason for Joining Political Leadership | To a Great Extent,<br>n (%) | To a Limited Extent,<br>n (%) | Not at All,<br>n (%) | Total,<br>n (%) |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Desire to serve                         | 45 (50.0)                   | 40 (45.3)                     | 4 (4.7)              | 89 (100.0)      |
| Noticeable leadership gap               | 31 (34.6)                   | 45 (50.0)                     | 13 (15.4)            | 89 (100.0)      |
| Need to promote development             | 47 (52.9)                   | 34 (38.2)                     | 8 (8.8)              | 89 (100.0)      |
| Pressure/request from people            | 28 (32.0)                   | 50 (56.0)                     | 11 (12.0)            | 89 (100.0)      |
| Need to unite people                    | 40 (45.0)                   | 49 (55.0)                     | 0 (0.0)              | 89 (100.0)      |
| To get connections to power holders     | 37 (41.2)                   | 47 (52.9)                     | 5 (5.9)              | 89 (100.0)      |
| Employment opportunity                  | 37 (41.6)                   | 45 (50.6)                     | 7 (7.8)              | 89 (100.0)      |
| Inspiration from a political background | 45 (50.0)                   | 41 (46.4)                     | 3 (3.6)              | 89 (100.0)      |
| Draw respect/attain recognition         | 49 (54.5)                   | 32 (36.4)                     | 8 (9.1)              | 89 (100.0)      |

Source: Field data (2025).

### 3.2.6. Qualitative Findings concerning Women's Involvement in Political Leadership

Qualitative data from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions revealed several recurring themes regarding women's participation in political leadership in Oyam South County.

Participants consistently reported that women are more active at lower levels of governance, such as parish and sub-county leadership, but face challenges in accessing higher political offices. This was attributed to perceptions that certain leadership positions are reserved for men, as well as limited access to resources and political networks.

Financial constraints emerged as a key barrier. Several participants indicated that women often rely on spouses or family members for campaign support, which

limits their independence. One respondent noted that women “lack personal funds and external connections” and therefore depend on their husbands, who may be reluctant to provide such support (R3).

Social and cultural perceptions were also identified as significant constraints. Participants reported that women candidates are frequently subjected to stigma, including negative labelling and public criticism. In some cases, women who engage in politics are discouraged by community members or face resistance within their households. As one participant explained, women are often labelled negatively or considered unsuitable for leadership roles (R2).

Family dynamics further influence participation, particularly for married women. Respondents indicated that marital expectations and fear of domestic conflict discourage women from contesting in elections. Some participants also noted that misunderstandings between spouses may arise when women seek political positions, which can affect their participation.

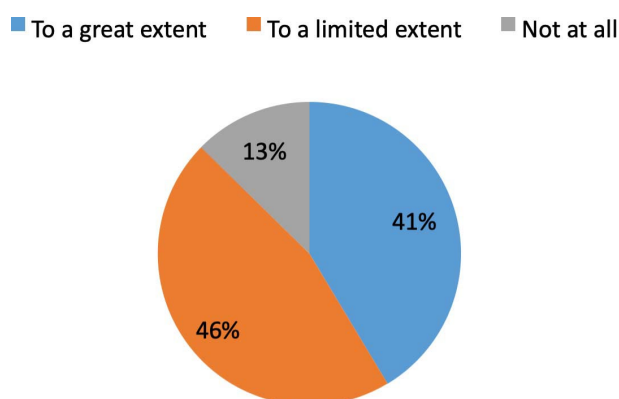
Educational and capacity-related limitations were also highlighted. Participants noted that women’s lower levels of formal education restrict their ability to compete for higher-level political positions. Although some women successfully meet local leadership expectations, they remain concentrated in lower-level roles due to qualification requirements (R4).

Despite these challenges, participants acknowledged that women’s involvement in politics is increasing. However, this progress is constrained by limited financial resources, negative societal attitudes, and restricted access to institutional support.

### 3.3. Gender Bias in the Electoral Systems

#### 3.3.1. Extent of Electoral System Barriers Faced by Women Seeking Political Office

**Figure 4** shows that 46% ( $n = 41$ ) of respondents indicated that gender bias constrains women’s participation in political leadership to a limited extent. A further 41% ( $n = 36$ ) reported that it constrains participation to a greater extent, while 13% ( $n = 12$ ) indicated that gender bias does not affect women’s political participation.



**Figure 4.** The extent to which women seeking political office are hindered by the barriers in the electoral system.

### 3.3.2. Factors Commonly Associated with Gender Bias in Electoral Systems

**Table 4** shows that violence and harassment were the most frequently reported barriers to women's political participation, cited by 28.6% (n = 55) of respondents. Limited access to campaign financing was the second most reported barrier (24.5%, n = 47), followed by voter bias against female candidates (17.7%, n = 34). Traditional gender roles were reported by 10.9% (n = 21) of respondents. Limited opportunities in party leadership (6.3%, n = 12) and media coverage (5.2%, n = 10) were also identified. Institutional barriers, including legal and administrative factors, were reported by 4.7% (n = 9) of respondents.

**Table 4.** Factors commonly associated with gender bias in electoral systems.

| Count                                                    | Factor                                    | Responses, n (%)   |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Factors associated with gender bias in electoral systems | Violence and harassment                   | 55 (28.6)          |
|                                                          | Access to campaign financing              | 47 (24.5)          |
|                                                          | Voter bias against women candidates       | 34 (17.7)          |
|                                                          | Traditional gender roles                  | 21 (10.9)          |
|                                                          | Limited opportunities in party leadership | 12 (6.3)           |
|                                                          | Media coverage                            | 10 (5.2)           |
|                                                          | Institutional barriers                    | 9 (4.7)            |
|                                                          | Others                                    | 4 (2.1)            |
| <b>Total</b>                                             |                                           | <b>192 (100.0)</b> |

Source: Field data (2025).

### 3.3.3. Qualitative Insights

Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions provide further insight into the challenges affecting women's political participation and representation.

Participants reported that women often lack visibility in higher political offices and are perceived to have limited influence. Concerns were raised about the limited accountability of elected representatives, with some respondents indicating that leaders fail to engage consistently with their communities after elections. As one participant noted, community members felt that their concerns, particularly those affecting rural women, were not adequately addressed (R18).

Respondents also highlighted dissatisfaction with recurring leadership patterns, where the same individuals dominate political positions across election cycles. Participants expressed concern that this pattern restricts opportunities for new entrants, including women seeking leadership roles.

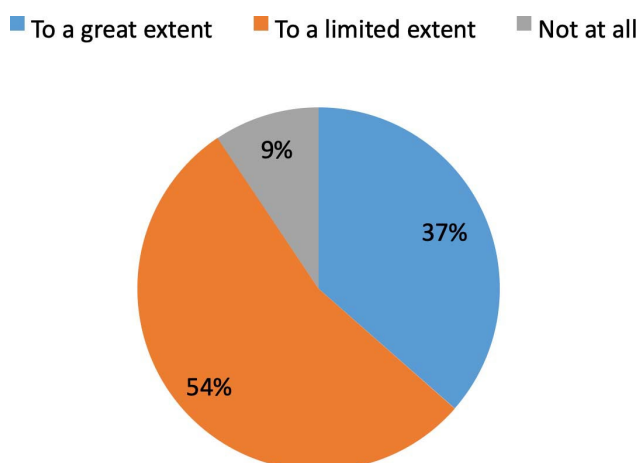
Issues related to unequal access to political resources were also reported. Participants indicated that financial and institutional support is often concentrated among a few individuals, limiting broader participation. In addition, some respondents emphasised the need for leadership characterised by accountability, responsiveness, and community engagement.

Overall, the qualitative findings indicate concerns related to representation, leadership access, and resource distribution within the political system.

### 3.4. Women's Obstacles in Political Leadership

#### 3.4.1. Extent of Women's Participation in Political Leadership

**Figure 5** shows that 54% (n = 48) of respondents perceived women's participation in political leadership to be limited, indicating a widespread community view that women remain underrepresented in leadership roles. A further 37% (n = 33) perceived women's participation to a greater extent, while 9% (n = 8) indicated that women do not participate in political leadership.



**Figure 5.** Extent of women's participation in political leadership.

#### 3.4.2. Factors Limiting Women's Political Leadership

**Table 5** presents the barriers to women's participation in political leadership as perceived by respondents. Limited operational funds were the most frequently cited barrier, reported by 25.7% (n = 69) of respondents. Negative community attitudes were reported by 15.6% (n = 42), followed by gender discrimination (14.1%, n = 38) and low educational levels (13.0%, n = 35). Other barriers included lack of transport for community activities (11.2%, n = 30), corruption (8.2%, n = 22), and limited access to training (7.4%, n = 20). A smaller proportion of respondents identified a lack of cooperation with community leaders (4.8%, n = 13) as a constraint.

**Table 5.** Women's obstacles in political leadership in Oyam South County.

| Count     | Women's Obstacles                                 | Responses, n (%) |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------|
|           | Limited funds for operations                      | 69 (25.7)        |
|           | Poor attitude of other people in the community    | 42 (15.6)        |
| Obstacles | Gender discrimination                             | 38 (14.1)        |
|           | Low academic qualifications                       | 35 (13.0)        |
|           | Lack of transport to monitor community activities | 30 (11.2)        |
|           |                                                   |                  |

**Continued**

|                                            |                    |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Corruption                                 | 22 (8.2)           |
| Lack of training                           | 20 (7.4)           |
| Lack of cooperation with community leaders | 13 (4.8)           |
| <b>Total</b>                               | <b>269 (100.0)</b> |

Source: Field data (2025).

### 3.4.3. Improvements in Women's Participation

**Table 6** presents respondents' recommendations for improving women's participation in political leadership. Increasing operational funds was the most frequently cited measure, reported by 27.0% (n = 67) of respondents. Improving societal attitudes and women's educational attainment were each identified by 12.9% (n = 32). Provision of transport for community activities was reported by 11.7% (n = 29), while increased training in political leadership was indicated by 11.3% (n = 28). Other suggested measures included strengthening cooperation with community leaders (10.9%, n = 27) and reducing gender discrimination (10.5%, n = 26). A smaller proportion of respondents (2.8%, n = 7) identified zero tolerance for corruption as a strategy for improving participation. Qualitative findings further indicate that women face both economic and social constraints, including limited access to resources, negative community perceptions, and discouragement from participating in political processes.

**Table 6.** Improvements in women's participation in political leadership.

| Count                                 | Proposed Improvement                                  | Responses, n (%)   |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Improvements in women's participation | Increase funds for operations                         | 67 (27.0)          |
|                                       | Improve the attitude of other people in the community | 32 (12.9)          |
|                                       | Improve academic qualifications of women              | 32 (12.9)          |
|                                       | Avail transport to monitor community activities       | 29 (11.7)          |
|                                       | Increasing women's training in political leadership   | 28 (11.3)          |
|                                       | Cooperation with community leaders                    | 27 (10.9)          |
|                                       | Limit gender discrimination                           | 26 (10.5)          |
|                                       | Zero tolerance to corruption                          | 7 (2.8)            |
| <b>Total</b>                          |                                                       | <b>248 (100.0)</b> |

Source: Field data (2025).

### 3.4.4. Qualitative Findings concerning Women's Obstacles in Political Leadership

Qualitative data from in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews further highlight the barriers affecting women's participation in political leadership.

Participants identified financial constraints, cultural norms, and gender-based restrictions as the main challenges. Several respondents indicated that women of-

ten lack the financial resources required for campaigns and community engagement, which limits their ability to compete effectively. One participant noted that engaging voters without financial support is difficult, as communities often expect material incentives during campaigns (R15, R17).

Cultural expectations and gender norms were also widely reported. Participants stated that women are often discouraged from pursuing political leadership, particularly married women who are expected to prioritise domestic responsibilities. In some cases, male partners actively restrict women's participation in political activities (R14, R16).

Social perceptions were identified as an additional barrier. Respondents reported that women in politics are sometimes subjected to stigma, negative labelling, and public criticism. These perceptions were said to discourage women from contesting political positions and limit community support for female candidates.

Family dynamics also play a significant role. Participants indicated that concerns related to marriage and social expectations influence women's decisions to engage in politics. Both married and unmarried women were reported to face social pressure, which affects their participation.

In addition, respondents highlighted issues related to education, noting that candidates with higher qualifications are more likely to receive voter support. Limited educational attainment was therefore perceived as a constraint for many women seeking leadership positions.

### 3.5. Government's Efforts and Enabling Factors

#### 3.5.1. Public Perception

**Table 7** shows that voting preferences were the most frequently reported public perception, cited by 38.8% (n = 62) of respondents. Leadership roles were reported by 30.5% (n = 49), indicating recognition of women's presence in leadership positions. The need for recognition was identified by 16.9% (n = 27) of respondents, while capacity building was reported by 13.8% (n = 22). These findings reflect key areas highlighted by respondents regarding women's participation in political leadership.

**Table 7.** Public perception of women in political leadership.

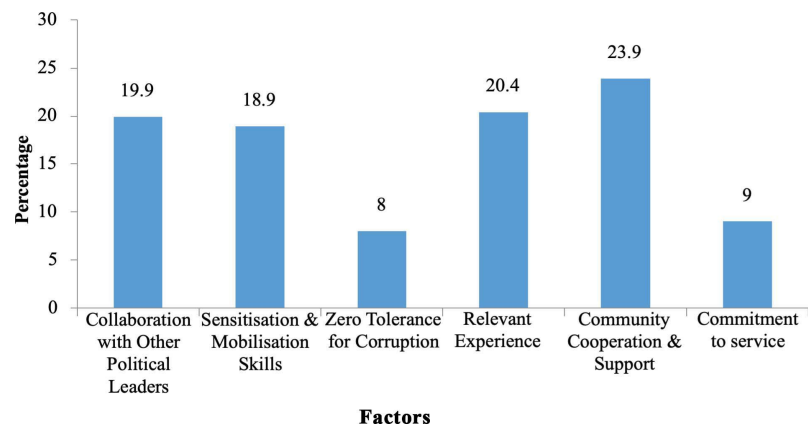
| Count                                    | Public Perception      | Responses, n (%)   |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Public perception about women leadership | Voting preferences     | 62 (38.8)          |
|                                          | Leadership roles       | 49 (30.5)          |
|                                          | Women need recognition | 27 (16.9)          |
|                                          | Capacity building      | 22 (13.8)          |
| <b>Total</b>                             |                        | <b>160 (100.0)</b> |

Source: Field data (2025).

#### 3.5.2. Factors Enabling Women to Participate in Political Leadership

**Figure 6** presents respondents' views on factors influencing women's success in political leadership. Community cooperation and support were the most frequently

cited factors, reported by 23.9% (n = 21) of respondents. Relevant experience was identified by 20.4% (n = 18), while collaboration with other political leaders was reported by 19.9% (n = 18). Sensitisation and mobilisation skills accounted for 18.9% (n = 17) of responses. Commitment to service was reported by 9.0% (n = 8), whereas zero tolerance for corruption was the least cited factor, with 8.0% (n = 7). These findings highlight the range of factors identified by respondents as influencing women's effectiveness in political leadership.



**Figure 6.** Factors enabling women to participate in political leadership.

### 3.5.3. Government Initiatives

**Table 8** presents respondents' views on government initiatives aimed at increasing women's participation in political leadership. Sensitisation of women was the most frequently reported initiative, cited by 35.0% (n = 63) of respondents. Mobilisation was identified by 21.7% (n = 39), while community support and collaboration accounted for 21.1% (n = 38). Promotion of political equality was reported by 12.8% (n = 23), and efforts to address corruption were cited by 7.8% (n = 14). Other initiatives, including training, gender-sensitive budgeting, and reserved seats, were reported by 1.7% (n = 3) of respondents. These findings summarise the range of initiatives identified by respondents as contributing to women's political participation.

**Table 8.** Government initiatives to improve women's participation in political leadership.

| Count                                                                                                                    | Government Initiative                                                        | Responses, n (%)   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Government initiatives to improve women's participation aimed at improving women's participation in political leadership | Sensitization of women                                                       | 63 (35.0)          |
|                                                                                                                          | Mobilization                                                                 | 39 (21.7)          |
|                                                                                                                          | Community support and cooperation                                            | 38 (21.1)          |
|                                                                                                                          | Equality in political participation                                          | 23 (12.8)          |
|                                                                                                                          | Fighting corruption and bribery                                              | 14 (7.8)           |
|                                                                                                                          | Others (training, gender-responsive budgeting, and reserved seats for women) | 3 (1.7)            |
| <b>Total</b>                                                                                                             |                                                                              | <b>180 (100.0)</b> |

Source: Field data (2025).

### 3.5.4. Qualitative Findings concerning Government's Efforts and Enabling Factors

Qualitative findings from interviews and focus group discussions provide additional insights into perceptions of government support for women's political participation. Several participants acknowledged that government policies formally support women's involvement in politics but highlighted gaps in implementation. For example, one respondent (R9) noted that although opportunities exist, women are not adequately supported to manage competing responsibilities or prepare for political challenges. Similarly, a political party leader (R10) indicated that while financial support exists, it is often limited to higher-level candidates and does not sufficiently reach grassroots participants. In contrast, another respondent (R12) reported a lack of visible government support, particularly in training, mobilisation, and the encouragement of women candidates at the local level. Participants also emphasised the importance of economic empowerment. One respondent (R11) highlighted the need for increased access to information and resources to enhance women's financial independence and political competitiveness. Focus group discussions further revealed mixed perceptions of government efforts. While some participants acknowledged that women's political rights are constitutionally protected (R13), others indicated that practical support mechanisms remain limited.

## 4. Discussion

The discussion of the findings is in relation to the study objectives and relevant scholarly literature on electoral gender bias and women's political participation and leadership. The findings are discussed in the broader context of gender, governance and political representation in Uganda and Africa, noting areas of convergence and divergence with earlier studies.

### 4.1. Women's Participation in Political Leadership in Oyam South County

The first objective was to examine the level of women's participation in political leadership in Oyam South County. The data show a clear gap between women's participation at the grassroots level and their representation in higher political posts. According to **Table 2**, 94.4% of respondents said women were involved in political leadership at the local or village level, 20% said women were involved in leadership at the district level, and 80% said women were not found in higher political posts (**Figure 2**). The gap shows that, whereas women have been able to achieve prominence in community-based governance systems, they have not moved up to the higher levels of political leadership.

The findings are in line with **Ahikire (2007)** and **Tripp et al. (2006)**, who suggest that decentralisation has created opportunities for women to engage in local governance, but this has not necessarily translated into equal representation in higher decision-making institutions. Similarly, **Atuhaire (2014)** found that women often build leadership credibility at the grassroots level but encounter major difficulties

in their efforts to move up to significant political roles.

The study also indicated that women play significant leadership roles in their communities. As illustrated in **Figure 2**, the most prevalent roles undertaken by women leaders were conflict resolution (21.3%), maintaining community security (21.3%), mobilising community members (18.0%), advocating for services (15.7%), representing in council meetings (13.5%) and coordinating community meetings (10.1%). The results support previous work that acknowledges the role of women as key players in peacebuilding, mediation, and community development (Atuhaire, 2014; Lee-Koo & Pruitt, 2020). In post-war contexts like Northern Uganda, where the reconstruction of social cohesion continues to be critical, the role of women in conflict settlement and community mobilisation is especially vital.

But the effectiveness of women is still viewed in a mixed light. **Figure 3** demonstrates that the respondents (48%) believe that women fulfil their leadership obligations to a limited extent. In contrast, 44% believe that women fulfil their leadership responsibilities to a great extent. This points to the fact that women's leadership is still judged in a societal context that is shaped by gendered expectations and double standards of performance. Like Tamale (1999), we find that women leaders are generally held to greater standards than men and their work is evaluated in light of gendered expectations, not objective leadership results.

The findings also highlight several motivations for women joining politics: to promote development (52.9%), the desire for respect and recognition (54.5%), community service (50.0%), and inspiration from political backgrounds (50.0%), as shown in **Table 3**. These results corroborate the work of Tamale (1999), who argues that women tend to consider political leadership as a means of benefiting their communities and breaking the cycle of exclusion from decision-making processes.

Qualitative findings further deepen this understanding. The participants consistently noted that women are increasingly participating in politics at the lower levels, but are hampered by such factors as financial limits, low education, preconceptions in the community and reluctance from spouses. This finding is consistent with feminist theory, especially the ideas of De Beauvoir (2011) and Hooks (1984), who claim that women's participation is often constrained by deeply established societal institutions rather than individual ability.

It is important to note that the findings presented in this study reflect respondents' perceptions of women's participation in political leadership rather than official administrative records. These perceptions, however, are consistent with available local government data. The Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2017) reported that women accounted for 45.5% of local government representation in Oyam District. The proportion of women representatives at the sub-county level stood at 46.2%, but at the district council level, it was 40.7% (UBOS, 2017: p. 54). These official numbers indicate that the representation of women is more robust at the lower levels of governance and falls at the higher levels of decision-making,

which is closely mirrored in the perceptions of the respondents as given in **Figure 2** and **Table 2**. Besides, the same report shows that women filled only 0.9% of all the local government chairperson seats nationally, which shows the ongoing underrepresentation of women in the most prominent elected positions (UBOS, 2017: p. 17). Thus, although the present results are perception-based, they are backed by official local government statistics revealing persisting gender disparities in higher political leadership.

#### 4.2. Gender Bias in the Electoral System and Women's Political Participation

The second objective explored the role of gender bias in election systems in putting women candidates at a disadvantage. The results show that gender prejudice in elections is still a major obstacle. As shown in **Figure 4**, 46% of respondents stated that gender bias affects women's political participation to a limited extent, while 41% stated that it limits women's political participation to a great extent. Overall, these data imply that nine out of ten respondents think that gender bias impedes women's political participation.

The most important element related to electoral gender bias was assault and harassment, with 28.6% of respondents (**Table 4**). The next biggest problem was campaign financing at 24.5%, followed by voter bias against female candidates at 17.7%. Traditional gender norms contributed 10.9%, indicating that cultural barriers are still strongly rooted in local political processes.

These findings are consistent with Čičkarić and Mršević's (2019) conclusion that election violence is among the biggest disincentives for women's political engagement globally. Violence not only fosters physical insecurity but also instils fear and prevents women from participating in politics. The prevalence of violence and harassment in Oyam South County shows that election venues are still considered hazardous places for women. These findings echo Krook (2020), who identifies violence against women in politics as a global tactic to dissuade women's participation and influence in political issues.

Similarly, limiting access to campaign resources mirrors broader trends noted by Matland and Studlar (1998) and Shvedova (2005). Elections are expensive, and women often find themselves in socio-economic settings that do not offer them as many opportunities to acquire financial capital. The finding is well supported by the qualitative data; respondents said that women often depend on their husbands or families for campaign funds and have difficulties in finding independent sources of finance. Such reliance strengthens asymmetric power relations and restricts political sovereignty.

The voter bias against women candidates also indicates the effects of patriarchal views on the election results. Participants noted that women are typically viewed as less capable of leading and are subjected to greater scrutiny than male candidates. These findings are in line with Norris and Lovenduski (1995), who believe that election results are not only dependent on qualities of the candidate but also

on the societal attitude of voters towards women's leadership.

The qualitative findings provide strong evidence for the social factors of electoral gender bias. Some respondents reported being adversely branded when running for political office. Others said women are discouraged by husbands and community members who believe politics is a man's realm. These results provide substantial support for feminist arguments such as those made by [Butler \(1990\)](#) and [Hooks \(2000\)](#) that gender is a social construction that is sustained by cultural norms and institutional practices.

In sum, the study indicates that electoral bias is not limited to formal electoral procedures. This is strengthened by social attitudes, socioeconomic inequality and violent and cultural norms that combine to penalise women seeking political office.

### **4.3. Obstacles to Women's Political Leadership in Oyam South County**

The third objective looked at barriers to women's political leadership. The data demonstrate that women's participation is hampered by a mix of economic, social, educational and institutional impediments. As seen in [Figure 5](#), 54% of respondents said women's participation in political leadership was restricted, while 37% of respondents thought women participate to a significant extent.

The major challenge was economic restrictions. As can be seen in [Table 5](#), the greatest cited impediment was the lack of operational finances, which made up 25.7% of the respondents. This data shows campaign spending as a key cause of gender prejudice. The regularity of these findings underscores the importance of economic disadvantage in shaping women's political chances. This is consistent with findings of [Kakaire and Adibaku \(2019\)](#) that female political leaders in post-conflict Northern Uganda are continuously challenged by financial, cultural and institutional hurdles.

Other significant hurdles were negative community perceptions (15.6%) and gender discrimination (14.1%). The results show that political exclusion is not only an economic issue but a social and cultural issue too. As [Obayomi \(2020\)](#) observed, women are usually in the house rather than in a public leadership position. These views discourage women from contesting for public office and reduce community support for women who compete.

Low levels of education were cited as a barrier by 13.0% of respondents. This finding is especially relevant given the demographic profile of the respondents, with 58.4% reporting just primary education and only 10.1% reporting university qualifications. Consequently, educational inequities continue to erode women's confidence, competitiveness and aptitude for leadership positions.

These quantitative patterns are supported by qualitative observations. Often, participants shared experiences of spouses discouraging their wives from running for elections, communities doubting women's leadership potential, and verbal abuse and societal shame directed at women candidates. Married women were

especially sensitive to pressure from their husbands, whereas single women faced negative preconceptions about their morality and leadership abilities. These findings can be explained by means of feminist ideology. Wollstonecraft (2004) highlighted the need for education to enable equal involvement, and Friedan (1963) critiqued patriarchal structures that restrict women to domesticity. The experiences narrated in Oyam South County show how these arguments remain relevant as women continue to manage intersecting economic, educational and cultural constraints.

Notably, the recommendations made by the respondents concerning increasing women's participation closely matched the barriers highlighted. The most commonly recommended measures were raising operating finances (27.0%), altering societal attitudes (12.9%), boosting academic qualifications (12.9%) and expanding leadership training (11.3%), as shown in Table 6. This suggests broad societal awareness of what is retarding women's political progress.

#### 4.4. Effectiveness of Government Initiatives to Promote Women's Political Participation

The fourth objective was to examine the effectiveness of government programs in encouraging women's participation in political leadership. The results suggest that the government interventions increased knowledge and participation but had limited success in addressing deeper structural barriers.

As seen in Table 8, sensitisation initiatives were the most common government initiative noted (35.0% of responses). Other often recorded activity types included mobilisation efforts (21.7%) and community support actions (21.1%). The statistics show that the respondents generally associate government operations with raising awareness and providing encouragement, not with direct financial assistance.

The public's view of female leadership, overall, was positive. According to Table 7, 38.8% of the responses were about voting preferences, 30.5% about leadership responsibilities, 16.9% about the recognition of women leaders and 13.8% on capacity building. These findings suggest a growing backing for women's involvement in political leadership and mark a step forward in breaking down traditional gender conventions.

Figure 6 also presents parameters associated with success in women's political participation. The most important enabling variables identified were community support and cooperation (23.9%), relevant experience (20.4%), collaboration with political leaders (19.9%) and mobilisation skills (18.9%). The results suggest that the success of political leadership depends on social support networks and actual political experience, not merely on individual attributes.

Qualitative research, however, shows important limitations of the governmental efforts. The participants recognised constitutional safeguards and affirmative action provisions, but many stated that practical support is missing. A number of respondents observed that training, mentorship programmes and financial support are rarely available to women leaders at the grassroots level. Others said sup-

port appeared to benefit women pursuing higher office, while local candidates received little assistance.

This conclusion supports Ahikire and Mwiine's (2015) assertion that Uganda has rather advanced gender policies that typically encounter implementation challenges at the local level. Tamale (2000) came to similar conclusions, claiming that substantive gender equality cannot be achieved by legislation reform alone without strong enforcement and institutional commitment.

From a feminist perspective, the discrepancy between legal promises and concrete results points to greater challenges of symbolic representation. Many respondents were concerned that affirmative action might have led to increased representation of women in politics but not to a transformation of the power structures inside political institutions. This reinforces Nzomo's (2011) argument that quotas and legal reforms, while necessary, are not sufficient without larger shifts in political culture and resource allocation. The findings also support Burnet's (2011) argument that affirmative action and gender quotas can improve women's descriptive representation, even if larger structural barriers still exist.

Overall, the results suggest that government actions have contributed to raising knowledge of women's political rights and participation at the local level. This corroborates the ideas of Arriola, Johnson, and Phillips (2021) that the growth of women in African politics entails not only formal legal safeguards but also access to political networks, campaign resources, party support and institutional routes. The work shows that women's political successes are the product of structural factors and wide-ranging political climates, and underscores the need for continued support beyond legislative action. However, the effectiveness of these measures is still limited by financial constraints, patriarchal attitudes and lack of institutional support. It is therefore imperative that any meaningful success in women's political representation takes a more holistic approach that includes legislative reform, economic empowerment, community sensitisation, leadership development and sustained institutional commitment.

## 5. Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations

After analysing and discussing the findings of this study, it is obvious that women in Oyam South County still face major barriers to political involvement and leadership despite the continued efforts of the government and the existing affirmative action policies. The findings underscore the impact of electoral gender bias, budgetary limitations, socio-cultural norms and institutional barriers to women's political leadership. The study ends with a few limitations; conclusions derived from the findings and recommendations for improving women's political participation and leadership opportunities in the following sections.

### 5.1. Conclusion

The study investigated the impact of gender biased electoral systems on women's political participation in Oyam South County in Northern Uganda. The findings

show that women participate actively in leadership at the local and village levels, but their participation is limited at district and higher levels of decision-making.

Women are key players at the community level, especially in dispute resolution, mobilisation, and promotion of services. But their advancement to higher political positions is limited by continued structural and socio-cultural barriers. These are inadequate financial resources, gender discrimination, bad social cultural attitude, low level of education and limited access to logistical aid.

The analysis also finds that existing government programmes, such as sensitisation campaigns and mobilisation operations, have helped to raise awareness but are not enough to address the basic barriers. Obstacles to women's effective participation are, in particular, implementation challenges, limited access to funding and inadequate institutional support.

The gender imbalance in the electoral system continues to be a major limitation, backed by voters' perceptions, unequal access to campaign resources and limited possibilities inside party structures. Women also face social constraints and cultural expectations that discourage them from aiming for leadership positions, particularly those at the upper levels.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that the paucity of women in political leadership is a result of structural barriers to development, not a lack of engagement. Meeting these issues requires a concerted approach that takes into account the economic, institutional and socio-cultural elements.

## 5.2. Limitations

The study has various limitations that need to be considered in interpreting the findings. First, the study was limited to Oyam South County only, which limits the extent to which the findings may be generalized to other districts, regions or national contexts with varying political, cultural and socio-economic situations. Second, the study was descriptive and cross-sectional, hence, only the opinions and experiences of the participants were collected at one point in time. Thus, the results are about patterns and linkages, rather than causal relationships between electoral gender bias and women's political participation. Thirdly, much of the data is based on self-reported perceptions and experiences of respondents through the use of surveys, interviews and focus group discussions. Although these impressions provide useful insights into local realities, they are prone to biases such as the influence of individual experiences, recall limits, or social desirability bias. Thus, throughout this study, when we talk about the "impact" or "effectiveness" of voting procedures, impediments or government measures, we mean the reported experiences and views of participants, not definitive causal consequences. Longitudinal, comparative, or experimental designs in studies of other districts would provide stronger evidence of causal linkages and generalizability.

## 5.3. Recommendations

### 5.3.1. Central Government

- Establish a dedicated national financing mechanism to support women candi-

dates, particularly at the grassroots level.

- Expand leadership training and mentorship programmes for women in politics.
- Implement and enforce gender-sensitive electoral security measures to address violence and harassment.
- Strengthen the enforcement of gender equality policies to ensure effective implementation.
- Promote nationwide public awareness campaigns to challenge cultural stereotypes about women's leadership.

#### **5.3.2. Local Government (District and Sub-County)**

- Provide logistical and transport support for women candidates, especially in rural areas.
- Promote community-based education programmes on gender equality and political participation.
- Strengthen collaboration with civil society organisations to deliver training and civic education.
- Enhance accountability mechanisms through community engagement and feedback platforms.
- Support local mentorship initiatives to encourage emerging women leaders.

#### **5.3.3. Parliament**

- Review and strengthen affirmative action policies to enhance women's political representation.
- Increase budgetary allocations for women's political empowerment programmes.
- Promote equal media access and visibility for female candidates during electoral processes.
- Strengthen oversight mechanisms to monitor inclusion in political participation.
- Develop policies that promote merit-based leadership and equal access to political opportunities.

#### **5.3.4. Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs**

- Enforce laws protecting women from electoral violence and discrimination.
- Integrate gender-sensitive provisions into electoral laws and procedures.
- Simplify reporting mechanisms for gender-based electoral violations.
- Conduct periodic reviews of gender-related legal frameworks to identify implementation gaps.
- Provide accessible legal support for women facing political discrimination.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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