

POLITICAL PARTY INTERNAL GOVERNANCE AND WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN COMPETITIVE POLITICS IN NAIROBI CITY COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Women participation in political parties remains a critical concern in democratic governance despite the existence of legal and institutional frameworks promoting gender equality. In Kenya, women continue to experience limited representation within political party leadership and decision-making structures. This study examined the influence of political party internal governance on women participation in political parties in Nairobi City County, Kenya. A descriptive research design was adopted. The study was anchored on African Feminist Theory and Institutional Theory, which provided a framework for understanding gender inclusion and institutional governance within political parties. The target population comprised 1,000 women leaders, political party officials, representatives of the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties, and aspiring female politicians within Nairobi City County. Stratified sampling was used to categorize respondents into the four stakeholder groups, while purposive sampling was used to select respondents with relevant knowledge and experience. A sample size of 286 respondents was determined using Yamane's formula. Data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS Version 26 through descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and regression analysis, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that political party internal governance had a significant positive influence on women participation in political parties. This positive direction indicates that more inclusive internal governance structures were associated with increased women participation, while exclusionary governance practices could constrain their participation. Internal governance characterized by fair nomination procedures, women representation in executive structures, and active women leagues was associated with improved leadership representation, nomination opportunities, and involvement of women in political decision-making processes. The study concludes that inclusive governance structures within political parties are essential for promoting meaningful participation of women in politics. The study recommends strengthening transparent nomination procedures, increasing women representation in party executive committees, and institutionalizing gender-inclusive governance structures within political parties.

Keywords: Political Party Internal Governance; Women Participation; Political Parties; Gender Inclusion; Women Leadership

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INTRODUCTION

The participation of women in political parties is a significant indicator of the democratic governance and gender equality of societies (Ogunbodede, 2023). Political parties are the major institutions involved with political leadership, candidate nominations, and governance structures (Nyadera & Kisaka, 2019). Therefore, women's involvement in political leadership is crucial for inclusive governance, justice, and accountability in a democracy. However, despite the increasing constitutional and legal obligations to promote gender equality, women still face exclusion from leadership roles in political parties (Kairanbayeva & Zhantoreyeva, 2024).

Globally, research shows that the internal organizational structure of political parties affects women's political participation. The parties that are transparent in their nominating procedures, inclusive in their organizational structure, and have policies in place to promote gender considerations in leadership are more likely to see greater proportion of women in leadership roles (Springer, Klein, & Ludecke 2024). However, many female candidates are still hindered by male-dominated party systems, patron-client networks, and practices of exclusion (Santucci et al. 2023). In Spain, it has been found that female political leaders are poorly represented despite gender equity legislation in place because of institutionalized patriarchy and informal networks dominated by men (Santucci et al. 2023). In Germany, the research showed that while the implementation of gender quotas has increased women interest in politics and involvement in it at lower levels, the representation of women in leadership positions remained limited due to inconsistent enforcement and resistance within the parties (Springer, Klein, & Ludecke 2024). In Pakistan, the introduction of reserved seats for women has ensured greater representation of women in Parliament but did not contribute to women's role in the leadership of the parties (Mufti & Jalalzai, 2021).

International mechanisms including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action highlight the importance of women's involvement in political leadership and decision-making (UN, 2020). Several governments adopted laws and policies designed to increase the participation of women in politics. For example, Sweden instigated changes that resulted in a greatly increased female presence in parliament, showing that such initiatives have proven successful (Perehudoff, 2020). Despite successes in implementing gender reforms, however, there are obstacles that continue to undermine their effectiveness.

In Africa, gender quota policies and affirmative action strategies have led to improvements in women's political participation. The United Nations Development Program (2023) emphasized that women's representation in African legislatures rose from 7% in 1990 to about 24% in 2023. Rwanda holds one of the leading positions in women's political participation being the country where women occupy more than 60% of parliamentary seats (Burnet, 2019). Despite progress, problems with implementation within political party systems still impedes women's inclusion in leadership positions and nomination processes (Klasen & Minasyan, 2021). Research across various African nations illustrates that governmental organization within political parties is a significant factor determining women's political participation (Aderayo, 2021). A similar situation can be observed in South Africa where despite introducing gender quotas, internal resistance in political parties still limits women's participation in leadership positions (Klasen & Minasyan, 2021). Another example of a situation when political party nomination system together with inequality in access to political resources leads to challenges for women candidates can be provided by Nigeria (Aderayo, 2021).

Kenya has made great progress in introducing constitutional and legal changes to ensure equal chances in politics for men and women. The Constitution of Kenya (2010), mainly Article 27 and Article 81(b), gives a guiding framework for gender equality and two-thirds ruling on gender representing in different state institutions (Ghai, 2021). The Political Parties Act (2011) has further stipulated responsibilities of political parties to make sure that gender balance is preserved in their structure and nomination process while the Elections Act (2011) improves the enforcement of gender equality regulations. However, despite all the changes women are still having less chances to be involved in the affairs of political parties and to be elected

to the political positions (Berry, Bouka, & Kamuru, 2020). Political events are ruled by men and nomination processes make it even harder for women to get involved (Wainaina, 2017). Studies carried out in Kenya have shown that the high level of political violence, discrimination in nomination processes, lack of money, and weak institutional support totally prevent women from gaining access to politics (Kamau, 2018).

Nairobi City County serves as a fitting and relevant place for studying women participation in political parties as it is home to many political parties' headquarters and to the political and administrative center of the country. The county is involved in numerous political mobilization efforts and party nomination processes, thanks to its political significance. Despite the significant number of women engaged with political parties, they are still underrepresented in leadership structures and party nominations (ORPP, 2023). According to the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (2023), women made up about 46% of all registered political party members, but less than 20% of all senior leaders of political parties were women. In the 2022 general elections, women managed to get only a limited number of elected positions in Nairobi City County, even though they had taken part in political activities (Nyambura, 2024). This provokes questions regarding the effectiveness of the political party internal management system in advancing gender equality and representation in politics.

Thus, the internal governance structures of political parties greatly affect the level of women's representation and participation in political decision-making. Governance structures like the nomination process of candidates, executive representation, female organizations, and internal processes of decision-making significantly affect the presence of women in politics. Participatory and inclusive governance mechanisms might bring an opportunity to increase the number of women leaders in political parties, whereas the non-participatory approach will only perpetuate the already existing gender inequalities in political institutions. This study, therefore, examined the effect of political party internal governance on women participation in political parties in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the existing constitutional and legal frameworks that advocate for gender equality and inclusive governance, women's participation in political parties in Kenya is still low. The Constitution of Kenya (2010), Political Parties Act (2011), and Elections Act (2011) have put in place a number of mechanisms that help promote women representation in political leadership but women still lack representation in political party structures.

Despite this, political parties continue to implement their internal governance structures in a manner that disadvantages women through exclusionary nomination processes, male dominated executive committees, lack of access to political resources, and poor support systems. Nonetheless, political parties are required to promote gender inclusivity and have equal representation but many are still operating using mechanisms that support male candidates and align with patriarchal political institutions.

Previous studies have centered mainly on socio-cultural aspects, violent politics, legal changes, and gender integration in politics. In his study, Kamau (2018) noted that informal party structures and stereotypes prevailing toward women influence their leadership experiences in Kenya. Okoth (2021) points out that political parties did not have any efficient institutional mechanisms for supporting women candidates in spite of gender stipulations in the constitution. According to Berry, Bouka, and Kamuru (2020), political parties were also inconsistent with regard to the implementation of the requisites dictated by law and the Constitution in the course of the appointment and nomination process. Nonetheless, not enough empirical research has been conducted in relation to the influence exerted by internal governing structures of political parties on women participation within them. Nairobi City County is the political and administrative center of Kenya, and the major political parties are headquartered there. Thus, it is an interesting setting to explore the role of governance structures in political activities. Despite the high level of political activity in the area, women in Nairobi City County do not have proper representation in party leadership. Women constitute 46% of political

party members, but they hold no more than 20% of highest party leadership positions (ORPP, 2023). This raises concerns regarding the effectiveness of internal party governance mechanisms in promoting gender inclusivity and equitable political participation. This study, therefore, sought to examine the effect of political party internal governance on women participation in political parties in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The research was anchored in African Feminist Theory and Institutional Theory, which provided the theoretical framework for explaining the participation of women in political parties and the effect of political parties' internal governance on the level of gender inclusion in political leadership.

African Feminist Theory was invented by Steady (1981) and elaborated by Ogundipe-Leslie (1994). The theory explains how African women face discrimination within interconnected social, cultural, institutional, and historical frameworks. This theory states that to comprehend the marginalization of women in leadership roles, it is insufficient to look at things separately from patriarchal social systems, historical injustices, and institutional bias.

The relevance of African Feminist Theory to this research lies in its explanation of how political parties' governance systems can maintain patriarchal norms that hinder the involvement of women in leadership roles and decision-making processes. Internal governance systems, such as candidate selection procedures and executive leadership patterns, might exclude women even when the constitutional gender provisions exist. Thus, the theory offers the basis for explaining the influence of the internal governance of political parties on the involvement of women in political parties in Nairobi City County.

The research also employed the Institutional Theory of DiMaggio and Powell (1983). According to this theory, institutions operate under rules, norms, systems of governance, and organizational structures that define their behavior and results. It posits that organizations can respond to institutional pressures by embracing structures and practices that are considered legitimate and in compliance with their environment.

In this study, the theory was important because political parties operate in institutional frameworks under constitutions and party rules and procedures. The theory shows how political parties influence the participation of women through governance structures and mechanisms of decision-making. Additionally, it illustrates that ineffective governance and implementation of gender-related policies may limit the involvement of women in politics.

Both theories provided relevant background information because they explain both socio-cultural and institutional aspects affecting women participation in political parties. African feminist theory indicates existing patriarchal obstacles to women participation in politics whereas Institutional theory explains how the functioning of a party influences women's access to leadership and decision-making positions.

Empirical Literature

Women participating in political parties is crucial to achieving inclusive democracy and ensuring gender equality. Political parties are responsible for determining access to leadership, nomination and decision-making processes. Even though there is a legal framework for promoting gender equality, women's representation remains low in many countries. Research shows that political party governance mechanisms, including nomination processes, executive representation, institutional support systems and decision-making mechanisms, affect women participation in politics.

Aderayo (2021) examined how political parties affect women participation in politics in West Africa. The study analyzed the issue of transparency in nomination processes and the provision of campaign finance as aspects of internal governance. The study evaluated female representation in the political arena based on their

ability to run for elections and win. The results show how lack of transparency in nominations affects the possibility of women growing in politics. The research further identified the influence of informal patronage systems in politics affecting women positively and negatively. However, the study only used secondary data sources and adopted a generalized regional approach, making it difficult to account for local variations in governance structures within political parties. The study, therefore, presented both methodological and geographical gaps. The current study addressed these gaps by adopting a mixed-method approach involving both quantitative and qualitative data collected from primary and secondary sources within Nairobi City County.

Kidanie and Hailu (2024) analyzed the political involvement of women in the general elections in Ethiopia that took place in 2021 by determining how political parties affected the processes of gender inclusivity. The research utilized qualitative research which included interviews of party leaders and women running for office and content analysis of political party manifestos as well as electoral reports. The term internal governance was explained in terms of ideological commitments and mechanisms of voluntary inclusion and participation of women was examined by analyzing matters such as candidacy and campaign participation. The authors found that voluntary inclusion mechanisms were inefficient because the required governance structures did not exist in those parties. The study also found out that the presence of male-led governance in the political parties had a negative impact on the nomination process even under the conditions of the existence of formal rules regarding gender inclusion. Nevertheless, the authors of the study did not provide empirical data regarding the enforcement of rules and did not indicate measurable indicators regarding governance at the party level as well. Due to this situation, the study is characterized by certain drawbacks on the methodological and theoretical levels.

Nyadera and Kisaka (2019) researched the effects of political party systems on women's participation in politics in Africa. This study was based entirely on secondary data from prior studies, government documents, and governance reports to evaluate leadership arrangements in political parties and internal governance systems. The authors defined internal governance based on party leadership structures and compliance with international standards of sexual equality, while women's participation was assessed based on women's representation in party leadership positions. The study found that political organization greatly affected women's political participation and the importance of inclusive governance systems in obtaining a higher level of women's presence. Nevertheless, the study had a methodological flaw; it used only secondary data and failed to add empirical data from field studies. There was also a lack of quantitative calculations in the analysis of the connection between governance and women participation. Moreover, this study had a geographical gap since it generalized Africa without covering specific political situations in Nairobi City County. The present research solves these problems by using a mixed-method approach that combines both qualitative and statistical data collected from both primary and secondary sources in Nairobi City County. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

Okoth (2021) surveyed gender mainstreaming in political parties in the Nyanza region of Kenya. A qualitative design methodology was used where women candidates, political actors, and party leaders were interviewed. Internal governance was represented by nomination processes and institutional frameworks implemented in the parties while women's participation was evaluated through their access to nominations and support for campaigns. The study found that political parties didn't have any institutional mechanisms to support women candidates, although there exists a constitutional framework for gender equality. The study highlighted that women candidates could not secure nominations due to a lack of adequate institutional support from the parties and external institutional barriers. Although the study brought important findings about party governance, it was based only on qualitative research, and no statistical relationship was presented in the analysis. Moreover, the study was focused on a specific region of Kenya which has a different political

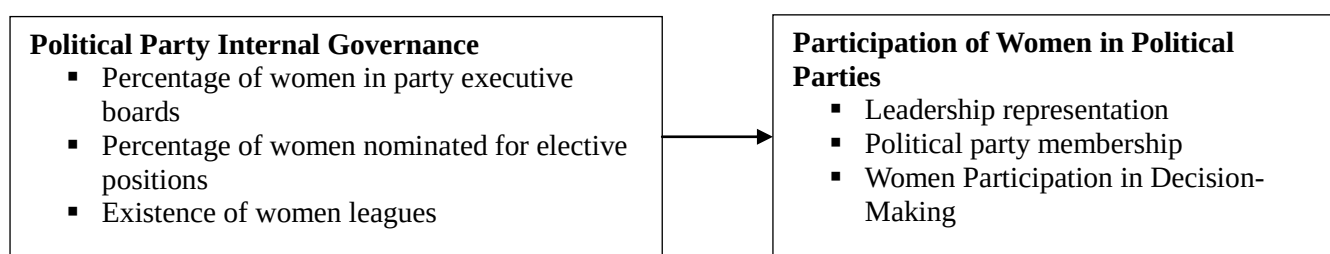
background from Nairobi City County. The study, thus, has both methodological and geographical shortcomings. The current study will overcome these limitations by using both qualitative and quantitative methods in the research, utilizing primary as well as secondary information about Nairobi City County.

Kamau (2018) studied the experiences of female leaders who served as civil and parliamentary leaders between 2003 and 2007 in Kenya using a qualitative exploratory methodology. The main objective of the study was to investigate the challenges women face when dealing with political leadership in Kenya. The issue of internal governance in this case was analyzed through candidate selection, inter-party dynamics, and gender stereotypes in the operations of political parties. The researcher found out that informal political structures and patriarchal leadership systems acted as significant barriers to political leadership for women. In fact, those women leaders reported facing exclusion from the important decision-making structures and unfair treatment during the nomination processes. However, this study did not concentrate mainly on actual experiences of women but also did not cover the quantitative assessment of such indicators as the executive representation, nomination opportunities, and the women leadership structures. Thus, the findings of the study presented both methodological and theoretical gaps. The present study fills those gaps by including measurable governance indicators and by mixing both qualitative and quantitative data collected from primary and secondary sources.

The studies reviewed indicate that political party governance has a great impact on the role of women in political leadership. Research has shown that nominations, representation in executive positions, available institutional support, and internal decision-making processes affect women's access to leadership. Nevertheless, the studies conducted previously suffer from methodological loopholes since they relied mostly on qualitative methods and had used secondary data, from conceptual ones, because the governance indicators used were not well operationalized, from geographical since no attention was paid to the regions including Nairobi City County, and from analytical ones due to the fact that the studies were not statistically tested. The present study therefore sought to fill these gaps by adopting a mixed-method approach involving both quantitative and qualitative data collected from primary and secondary sources to examine the influence of political party internal governance on women participation in political parties within Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Conceptual Framework

This study conceptualized political party internal governance through women representation in executive boards, nomination procedures, and existence of women leagues within political parties. Women participation in political parties was measured through leadership representation, political party membership, and participation in decision-making processes. This is illustrated in Figure 1.



Independent Variable

Dependent Variable

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework. Source (Author 2026)

METHODOLOGY

The researchers employed descriptive research design in this study to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study in its natural context (Aggarwal & Ranganathan, 2019). This design was used to

explore how women participate in political parties due to the internal governance structure of the political party, which comprises nomination process, representation in executive positions, existence of women leagues and internal decision-making mechanisms. The application of descriptive design allowed the researchers to collect relevant information from a large number of stakeholders and gain insight about the extent of the governance structures as well as their perceptions on the efficacy of the governance structures applicable in the political parties regarding women participation in politics.

As stated by Mugenda and Mugenda (2009), descriptive design is suitable for studying current situations, attitudes and behaviors without manipulation of variables. This design allowed the researchers to examine the effect of internal governance of political parties on women's participation in political parties in Nairobi City County. Furthermore, this design enabled the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data.

Target Population

The target population consisted of people who were obtained from 74 politically registered parties in Nairobi City County. The population comprised women leaders with political or party management experiences, party executives accountable for the implementation of gender policies and ensuring good governance practices, representatives from the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP), and women aiming to engage in politics through political parties. These individuals were ideal candidates for the study as they possessed knowledge of governance, policies and rules within political parties. The target population included people directly involved in the processes of governance in political parties, making it suitable for studying the influence of political party governance on female participation in politics. The sample comprised 1,000 respondents who were chosen from the ORPP archive, records of political parties, and lists of women in charge of political leadership within parties (ORPP 2023).

Table 1: Target Population

Category	Population	Percentage (%)
Women Leaders (Party and Elected)	400	40.0
Party Officials	300	30.0
ORPP Representatives	100	10.0
Aspiring Female Politicians	200	20.0
Total	1,000	100.0

Source: Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (2023)

Sampling and Sample Size

The study adopted stratified and purposive sampling techniques. Stratified sampling was used to categorize respondents into women leaders, party officials, ORPP representatives, and aspiring female politicians in order to ensure proportional representation of all stakeholder groups. Purposive sampling was then used to identify respondents with relevant knowledge and experience regarding political party internal governance and women political participation.

The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for known populations at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error:

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

Where:

n = Sample Size; N = Target Population (1,000); e = Margin of Error = 0.05 for 95% confidence)

Sample Size, $n = \frac{1000}{1 + 1000(0.05^2)} = 286$

Thus, the study used a sample of 286 respondents, distributed proportionally across categories.

Data Collection Instruments

The researchers obtained information through a semi-structured questionnaire with closed-ended and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions consisted of five-point Likert scale statements on political party internal governance based on the nomination process, executive body representation, women leagues, among other things. The respondents expressed their ideas extensively on governance, nomination experiences, and whether women take part in decision-making in political parties, through open-ended questions.

In addition, secondary data was obtained from various official files and documents by the use of data collection sheet. Official records collected to get secondary data included the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties, various political party reports, and nomination records. A pilot study was also carried out in Machakos County using 29 respondents representing approximately 10% of the study sample of 286. The purpose of the pilot study was to test the validity and reliability of the research instruments and highlight issues that needed consultation. As per the criteria put forward by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), having 10% sample size is good for pilot testing. The validity of the questionnaire was ensured by linking all questionnaire items to the study objectives and the reliability was determined using Cronbach's alpha.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded and analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), version 26. Some descriptive statistics, like means, percentages, frequencies, and standard deviations, were used to give an overview of the respondents' opinions on political party internal governance and the involvement of women in political parties. In addition, Pearson correlation analysis was applied to identify the correlation between political party internal governance and the participation of women. At the same time, multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the impact of political party internal governance on women's participation in political parties. The information gathered from open ended questions was analysed using thematic analysis, which supported quantitative results. The secondary data from political parties records and reports made by ORPP were analysed together with primary data to clarify the interpretation of the findings achieved. Tables, graphs, and written explanations were used to present the results of the study. The relationship between political party internal governance and women participation in political parties was modeled using the following regression equation:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon$$

Where:

Y = Women's participation in political parties

X₁ = Political party internal governance

β₀ = Constant

β₁ = Regression coefficient

ε = Error term.

Descriptive Analysis of Political Party Internal Governance

Descriptive analysis was conducted to assess respondents' perceptions regarding political party internal governance and women participation in political parties. Respondents rated statements using a five-point Likert scale where 5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree, and 1 = Strongly Disagree. The results are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Political Party Internal Governance

Statement	SD F (%)	D F (%)	N F (%)	A F (%)	SA F (%)	Mean	S.D.
Women are fairly represented in party executive boards.	29 (10.4)	51 (18.3)	63 (22.7)	83 (29.9)	52 (18.7)	3.29	1.24
Political parties provide equal chances for women in executive leadership.	31 (11.2)	48 (17.3)	61 (21.9)	86 (30.9)	52 (18.7)	3.29	1.23
Political parties nominate women in sufficient numbers for elections.	35 (12.6)	57 (20.5)	64 (23.0)	76 (27.3)	46 (16.6)	3.15	1.25
Women are given fair opportunities during the party nomination process.	32 (11.5)	49 (17.6)	60 (21.6)	87 (31.3)	50 (18.0)	3.27	1.22
Most political parties have active women leagues.	26 (9.4)	44 (15.8)	58 (20.9)	90 (32.4)	60 (21.5)	3.41	1.19
Women leagues contribute to strengthening women role in politics.	24 (8.6)	39 (14.1)	56 (20.1)	97 (34.9)	62 (22.3)	3.48	1.17
Overall Mean						3.32	1.22

Source: Researcher, 2026

According to the results, women have made some progress in political party leadership but there is still much work to be done in terms of representation, nominations, and access to other decision-making bodies. With respect to representation of women in party executive boards, 29.9% of the respondents agreed and 18.7% strongly agreed that women are represented satisfactorily, while 18.3% gave a negative response, and 10.4% strongly disagreed with the statement. The average response ($\bar{x} = 3.29$, $\sigma = 1.24$) indicates moderate agreement, meaning that there is some progress, but there is still an imbalance in representation of women in party executive boards. Concerning equal opportunities for women to play a role in executive leadership, 30.9% agreed and 18.7% strongly agreed, while 17.3% disagreed and 11.2% strongly disagreed. The mean score ($\bar{x} = 3.29$, $\sigma = 1.23$) indicates moderate agreement meaning that although political parties try to create some opportunities for women to join leadership positions, there still exists inequality in access to them.

In relation to women's nominations at elections, 27.3% of participants gave an affirmative response by agreeing, while an additional 16.6% strongly agreed that sufficient numbers of women were nominated. Conversely, 20.5% disagreed, whereas 12.6% strongly disagreed. With regard to this particular statement, it received the lowest mean score ($\bar{x} = 3.15$, $\sigma = 1.25$), indicating that respondents were least convinced that women were nominated well enough for elections. Regarding fairness in the nomination process within political parties, 31.3% of respondents agree that women are given fair chances and 18.0% strongly agreed, while 17.6% disagreed and 11.5% strongly disagreed. The mean score ($\bar{x} = 3.27$, $\sigma = 1.22$) indicates a moderate level of perception.

The findings of the research showed that the women leagues play an essential role in the promotion of women's political participation. In particular, 32.4% of the respondents agreed and 21.5% claimed to fully agree that there are women leagues in most political parties. The mean score ($\bar{x} = 3.41$, $\sigma = 1.19$) shows a stronger level of agreement which shows that political parties have women leagues, but there may be differences in their activity level." Additionally, 34.9% agreed and 22.3% of respondents stated that women leagues help women be more active in political matters, which produced the highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 3.48$, $\sigma = 1.17$) making it clear that women leagues are important instruments for women's empowerment, organization, and political involvement.

In total, the analysis of six statements gave a mean score of $\bar{x} = 3.32$ and $\sigma = 1.22$ showing that women have moderate opportunities to be involved in political activities because of internal governing bodies of political parties, but there are still serious issues in the areas of leadership representation and nomination. These conclusions are in line with Gatto (2025), who showed that women remain underrepresented in candidate lists

and internal party decision-making structures as a direct result of party elite preferences and male-dominated nomination systems. The conclusions also underline the need for implementing the internal party reforms to ensure that the mechanisms intended to entrench women's participation in the political process lead to real political empowerment. Thus, the study emphasizes that transparent nomination systems and the accountability of leadership should be strengthened to enable women's presence in political leadership.

Qualitative findings further revealed that internal party governance structures remain predominantly male-dominated despite formal inclusivity provisions. Respondent P071 observed that *"Internal governance structures remain male-dominated despite formal equality provisions,"* while Respondent P084 explained that *"Decision-making frameworks often exclude women or assign them symbolic roles."* Respondents also described leadership support initiatives as inconsistent and unsustainable. Respondents acknowledged that mentorship initiatives, leadership development programs, and women leagues contribute to building confidence among female aspirants. Respondent P038 stated, *"Mentorship initiatives have contributed to improved confidence among female aspirants, but access is often limited to those with internal party backing,"* while Respondent P055 noted that *"Women leagues have played a mobilization role but are not integrated into real leadership pipelines."* Similarly, Respondent P02 stated that *"Support initiatives for aspiring women vary significantly and are rarely sustained beyond election cycles,"* while Respondent P119 added that *"Some organizational support exists such as capacity-building sessions, but they do not reach all potential candidates."* The findings are in agreement with Prihatini and Halimatusa'diyah (2024), who said support measures for women in political parties have a fragmented nature and are integrated poorly into nomination procedures, thus lowering their effectiveness over time. These findings are also in line with Madsen's (2023) findings, who stated that gendered institutional norms prevent women from occupying leadership positions in political parties, and Springer et al. (2024), whose research showed that short-term capacity building initiatives by parties fail to create viable leadership outcomes outside of further governance reforms.

Concerns regarding fairness and transparency in party nominations also emerged strongly across responses. Respondent P80 stated that *"Fairness in party nominations is questionable and often depends on who you know, not merit,"* while Respondent P047 emphasized that *"The nomination system favors established actors and marginalizes new female entrants."* In addition, respondents highlighted the persistence of patriarchal norms and structural inequalities within political parties. Respondent P164 remarked that *"Structural inequalities persist within party systems, including unequal access to campaign resources and platforms,"* while Respondent P096 stated that *"Patriarchal norms continue to limit leadership opportunities for women regardless of their competence."* These results are consistent with Lebediuk and Moroziuk's (2024) conclusion that opaque nomination systems consistently disadvantage women, and with Haug et al.'s (2020) argument that pervasive patriarchal norms in political organizations continue to maintain exclusionary behavior despite formal pledges of equality. Overall, the findings confirm that internal party governance is a significant hurdle for women's full engagement in political leadership and show that there has to be a transparent nomination process, gender-sensitive governance reform, continuous support for women in leadership, and steps to limit the impact of patriarchy in political parties.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that the internal governance of political parties plays an important role and positively affects the participation of women in political parties in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The presence of inclusive governance practices such as fair nomination processes, female representation in top management, active women's leagues, and participation in decision-making processes increases the participation of women in politics and their inclusion in leadership positions. Furthermore, the research claims that transparent and gender-inclusive governance systems in political parties increase the availability of political opportunities for women.

This research recommends that political parties set up gender-friendly governance structures to ensure that women's participation in leadership is successful and also to allow for the participation of women in the process of decision-making. Political parties need to develop transparent, merit-based nomination processes that help to improve women representation in executive leadership structures as well as provide women candidates with equal opportunities during nomination. The Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP) must improve the enforcement of compliance with gender regulations to make sure that political parties are compliant with the requirements set in the Constitution regarding gender equality. Besides, it is recommended that political parties improve women leagues, mentorship and leadership programs to help empower women within the party structure and help them with decision-making in politics. Furthermore, the research has pointed out that subsequent studies should investigate the influence of socio-cultural and political financing factors on women's participation in political leadership.

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