Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424



East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences
eajass.eanso.org
Volume 9, Issue 1, 2026
Print ISSN: 2707-4277 | Online ISSN: 2707-4285
Title DOI: https://doi.org/10.37284/2707-4285

EAST AFRICAN NATURE & SCIENCE ORGANIZATION

Original Article

An Analysis of Gender and Political Glass Ceiling in Apac District Local Governance, Northern Uganda

Ejang Mary[1*], *Apio Sarah Okite*[1], *Obote Denis*[1], *Okuna Victor*[1] & *Akello Judith Abal*[1]

[1] Lira University, P. O. Box 1035, Lira, Uganda.
*Author for Correspondence ORCID ID; https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0224-0761; Email: mejang@lirauni.ac.ug

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424

Date Published:
30 January 2026

Keywords:
Gender, Glass Ceiling, Political Leadership, Local Governance, Apac District.

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Despite the significant endeavor the Uganda government has made to uplift women in political participation, women are underrepresented in elected leadership positions. The paper presents the glass ceiling women encounter in elected leadership positions in the Apac district, northern Uganda. Methods: The researchers used cross-section research design and collected data using researcher-administered questionnaires from 45 respondents from Apac and Akokoro sub-counties. The respondents included female leaders and women political aspirants at Local Council III. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and the Pearson correlation coefficient. Results: The researchers found that most women who participated in the local governance in Apac district had low formal education attainment, and only 5.9 percent had a bachelor's degree. Low education level compounded with discriminative cultural values, gender stereotypes and portrayals against female candidates constrained women's political participation. Economically, women lacked ownership over household assets and resources to finance their political campaigns. Female candidates lacked spousal support and faced internal heightened political competition because of their gender. Notwithstanding the challenges, successful women leaders demonstrated resilience to pursue their political path. Conclusion: While the Government of Uganda constitutionally provide leadership prospects, in Apac district, women suffered hidden socio-economic barriers to elected political positions. Thus, implicit gender bias undermines women's participation in leadership and is regarded as followers and not as leaders, justifying women's low participation in competitive elective positions. This paper contributes to the role congruity and social role theories. However, the findings are limited in geographical scope since empirical data covers only two sub-counties in the Apac district, hence not generalizable. The researchers recommend collaborative support from the government, civil society and cultural institutions for women's political participation, including a wide range of mindset change on gender norms and stereotypes. This would enable women to realise their worth as potential leaders.

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424

APA CITATION
Mary, E., Apio, S. O., Obote, D., Okuna, V. & Akello, J. A. (2026). An Analysis of Gender and Political Glass Ceiling in Apac District Local Governance, Northern Uganda. *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, *9*(1), 211-224. https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424

CHICAGO CITATION
Mary, Ejang, Apio Sarah Okite, Denis Obote, Victor Okuna and Akello Judith Abal. 2026. "An Analysis of Gender and Political Glass Ceiling in Apac District Local Governance, Northern Uganda". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* 9 (1), 211-224. https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424

HARVARD CITATION
Mary, E., Apio, S. O., Obote, D., Okuna, V. & Akello, J. A. (2026). "An Analysis of Gender and Political Glass Ceiling in Apac District Local Governance, Northern Uganda", *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 9(1), pp. 211-224. doi: 10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424

IEEE CITATION
E. Mary, S. O. Apio, D. Obote, V. Okuna & J. A. Akello. "An Analysis of Gender and Political Glass Ceiling in Apac District Local Governance, Northern Uganda", *EAJASS*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 211-224, Jan. 2026.

MLA CITATION
Mary, Ejang, Sarah Okite Apio, Denis Obote, Victor Okuna & Judith Abal Akello. "An Analysis of Gender and Political Glass Ceiling in Apac District Local Governance, Northern Uganda". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol. 9, no. 1, Jan. 2026, pp. 211-224, doi:10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a largely desired and valued action and behaviour, not just a title or position, but as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2025). According to Northouse who describes leadership as a process involves influence and attention to common goals, and occurs in groups. Leadership and management have similar components; both involve working with individuals or groups of people and accomplishing sought-after goals. Leadership and management supplement one another (Galloway, 2022). Leadership creates visions and clarifies a larger picture, influencing and empowering subordinates to commit to the goals.

Geraldine Ferraro, a U.S. congresswoman and the first woman to run for U.S. vice president on a major party ticket, once stated that "some leaders are born women" (Chisholm-Burns, Brandon, & Spivey, 2021). There is little doubt that the statement is true. However, former U.S. Senator and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's failed presidential bid against a male opponent who has never held public office drew public attention to reflect on the state of women in leadership.

Globally, women hold only 29% of senior management positions (Thornton, 2020), and with increasing hierarchical positions in organisations, women's representation rapidly decreases (Meza-Mejia, Villarreal-García, & Ortega-Barba, 2023). Several studies have shown that across different countries over time, the characteristics of successful leaders resemble stereotypical masculine characteristics, but not feminine characteristics, thus explaining the difficulties of women in reaching leadership positions (Castaño et al., 2024; Rohman & Holilah, 2021). Don (2024), for instance, established the socio-economic and political challenges experienced by women political representatives in Sri Lanka. Often, leaders are mainly seen to have masculine traits and characteristics similar to men and not to women (Koenig et al., 2011). Thus, it is easier for men to move through the organisation's hierarchies to leadership positions than women (Wilhau & Karau, 2021; Badura, Galvin & Lee, 2022). Explicitly, women encounter a glass ceiling that is hard to break through in leadership.

Eckel et al. (2021) argue that the preference for male leaders over female leaders manifests itself in different occupational situations. For instance, in the hiring processes, leadership potential is

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424

overlooked when ranking female applicants. In the absence of leadership experience, men prefer male applicants, as opined by Wilhau & Karau (2021) and Hoover et al. (2019), while men with low power rate female applicants worse and suggest a lower income.

Gender and Political Glass Ceiling

The concept of Gender refers to socially constructed differences in attributes and opportunities associated with being female or male and to the social interactions and relations between women and men (Lindqvist, Sendén & Renström, 2021). According to the Sustainable Development Goal framework, gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context (Bernstein, 2017). Regrettably, as a result of gender discrimination, there are often inequalities in political power and representation. Grangeiro, Silva & Esnard (2022) argue that women are often underrepresented in formal decision-making structures, including governments, community councils, and policy-making institutions.

The glass ceiling is a sociological metaphor that refers to the invisible barriers and biases that keep women from opportunities to advance in their careers and workplace (Grangeiro, Silva, & Esnard, 2022). Meanwhile, the political glass ceiling refers to ‘the unseen, yet unbreachable barrier’ that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper ranks of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements (Babic & Hansez, 2021).

Due to increasing glass ceilings, discrimination and unfair treatment, women have historically been underrepresented in leadership positions across private and public organisations globally. Thus, gender inequality and gender discrimination remain very real challenges for women workers in general, and especially so for women striving for leadership positions (Offermann & Foley, 2020). Women have long faced gender stereotypes in the workplace, particularly when it comes to leadership positions. Stereotypes such as women being too emotional, not assertive enough, or lacking confidence can hinder their progress in leadership roles.

Many researchers emphasise gender differences as the main cause of gender inequality in leadership. Olsson and Walker give a qualitative analysis, which uses ancient Greek heroes Ulysses and Xena as a double-metaphor for different ways men and women search for satisfying careers (Olsson & Walker, 2003). Hakim proposes a preference theory citing gender differences in life goals, values, abilities and competitive behaviour (Hakim, 2006). O’Connor opines that the existence of glass ceilings is greatly due to 'different needs’ among women and men. The author sums up these differences with more metaphors: women prefer career treats, whereas men are much more likely to ascend career ladders (O’Connor, 2010).

Uganda Local Government System

Local government signifies the geographical stratification of administrative units under the principles of decentralisation. The mandate of a local government administrative unit is to deliver public services such as education and health to the people at the grassroots (Kyohairwe, Karyeija, & Nduhura, 2024). Hill (2024) resonates that modern local governments play an important role in society and are seen as an essential part of a democratic society. In public management and governance, local governance has been one of the most fascinating philosophies over the last four decades. According to Kuhlmann & Marienfeldt (2023), while subnational (local) governance has existed for some time in Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, in developing countries, this new form of governance became more prominent in the 1990s.

The evolution of local government in Uganda has transitioned from a decentralised colonial system to a recentralized post-independence one, and then to a comprehensive decentralisation policy initiated in 1987 (Mwesigwa, 2021). Key milestones include

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424

the 1967 Local Administrations Act, which led to recentralization, and the 1995 Constitution that solidified decentralization shifting power and functions to local governments and establishing democratically elected councils.

Local governments act as intermediaries for partnerships and service delivery, and aim to deliver equity gains for those served at the centre and grassroots through decentralisation. Decentralisation comprises three dimensions: political, administrative, and fiscal decentralization and other literature sources include a fourth dimension of economic/market decentralisation (Mwesigwa, 2021). Uganda's decentralisation system comprises political representation, legislative powers, administrative planning and policy execution powers, as well as judicial powers through which political local councils' courts are exercised. The economic powers are vital for managing local finances and other resources in partnership with other state or non-state actors or through practices of the liberal economy.

Uganda's local government structure is based on a district as the main unit, with a five-tier system in rural areas and a corresponding structure in urban areas (Kyohairwe, Karyeija, & Nduhura, 2024). The five levels are: District Councils (LC5), Sub-County Councils (LC3), Parish Councils (LC2), and Village Councils (LC1) in rural areas; and corresponding provinces, cities, municipal, divisions and Town Councils and wards/cells in urban areas (Ministry of Local Government, 2014). The key principle is the decentralisation of power from the national government to local governments, which have legislative and executive powers. In this paper, the researchers focus on level three, which is the sub-county council commonly referred to as Local Council III, politically headed by the Chairperson of Local Council III. The LC III legislates the sub-county for the rural setting, and the division for the urban setting is legislated by a Mayor (Ministry of Local Government, 2023). The functions of each council are distinguished and well stipulated under Part IV of the Local Governments Act 1997 (Second Schedule), suggesting a clear distinction of the roles and functions between the national and local governments. Specifically, the elected council committee have a duty to make laws, to approve budgets, take other political decisions and oversee service delivery being executed by administrators.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on the role congruity theory of prejudice by Eagly & Karau (2002) that focuses on the prejudice directed toward female leaders. The theory proposes that perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to 2 forms of prejudice: (a) perceiving women less favourably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles and (b) evaluating behaviour that fulfils the prescriptions of a leader's role less favourably when it is enacted by a woman. One consequence is that attitudes are less positive toward female than male leaders. Other consequences are that it is more difficult for women to become leaders and to achieve success in leadership roles. Evidence from varied research paradigms substantiates that these consequences occur, especially in situations that heighten perceptions of incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles (Babic & Hansez, 2021). Due-Billing and Alvesson (2000) and Boyce and Herd (2003), as cited by Wetzler et al. (2024), established relationships between gender role stereotypes and gender labelling in leadership. Thus, leadership has been predominantly a male prerogative in corporate, political, military, and other sectors of society.

Although women have gained increased access to supervisory and middle management positions, they remain quite rare as elite leaders and top executives. To explain this phenomenon, public and scientific discussion centres on the idea of a "glass ceiling", a barrier of prejudice and discrimination that excludes women from achieving higher-level leadership positions (Morrison, White & Van Velsor, 1987).

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424

To further this discussion, the researchers advance a theory of prejudice toward female leaders and test the theory in relation to available empirical research in the Apac district.

Problem Statement

In Uganda, women make up to 53% of the total population out of the 45,905,417 total population (UBOS, 2024), and yet they are underrepresented in the politically elected positions. Ugandan women make up only 34% of the seats in the 11th parliament, out of which only 1.7% are directly elected from constituencies. This low percentage is largely because most women in parliament gain their seats through the reserved district woman representative and other special interest group seats. Due to gender stereotypes, one out of five women in Uganda still reports experiencing gender-based discrimination in all spaces (Josefsson, 2014). Furthermore, 39% of Ugandans believe that men should be given priority for scarce jobs, hence discriminating against women. Moreover, the government of Uganda enacted affirmative action through a number of policies: The 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, the Uganda National Gender Policy (2007) and the Gender and Equity Strategy for Social Protection (2018). In the 2021 general elections, no single woman in the Apac district competed in the open constituency with the men for fear of stiff competition. This paper investigates the gender gaps in LC III leadership in the Apac district. The findings should inform policies to attain gender parity in political representation at the local governance level in Uganda.

Objective of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the underlying hidden barriers that limit women from competitive political leadership participation in the Apac district local governance. The paper addresses two specific objectives:

- To investigate the influence of socio-economic factors on female participation in local governance in Apac district.
- To analyse the relationship between gender stereotypes and women's political participation in the Apac district

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper adopted a quantitative approach and a cross-sectional and case study design. The cross-sectional design enabled the researchers to generate data on constraints to women's political leadership from the sub-counties of Apac and Akokoro at a single point within their natural settings. A case study design on the Apac district enabled analysis of the relationship between gender stereotypes and female political leadership participation.

The researchers collected data on the gendered hidden barriers and socio-economic constraints to women's political participation using researcher-administered questionnaires (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 45 female leaders, including the women who vied for political positions in the 2021 general elections at the LC III level in Apac but failed. The researchers used stratified and census sampling techniques to identify the 45 women for the study. The questionnaires were useful for gathering original data about women leaders (Weiss, 2020), their political experiences and social interactions, attitudes, opinions, and awareness of political leadership opportunities.

The researchers also reviewed selected documents to augment the discussions of the findings. Particularly, the researchers reviewed the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, the National Gender Policy (2007), Gender and Equity Strategy for Social Protection (2018) and Uganda Local Government Act 1997, amended 2018, in relation to women's political representation in elective political leadership in Uganda. In addition to the policy documents, the researchers reviewed

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424

relevant journal articles on women and political leadership.

The researchers analysed data at two levels. First, using descriptive statistics employing the frequency and mean to assess the demographic features of women leaders in the Apac district. Second, the researchers ran an inferential statistic, specifically the Pearson correlation coefficient, to examine the relationship between gender stereotypes and indicators of political glass ceiling, which constrained women's political participation in Apac and Akokoro sub-counties in Apac district.

RESULTS

In this section, the researchers present the findings on the demographic characteristics of the respondents, the influence of socio-economic factors on women's political participation and the effect of gender stereotypes on women's leadership in Apac district.

Table 1: Respondents' Biodata

Education level	Frequency	Percent	Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Certificate	24	52.9	Married	29	64.7
Degree	1	5.9	Single	11	23.5
Others	20	41.2	Separated	5	11.8
Total	**45**	**100.0**	**Total**	**45**	**100.0**

The majority of the women leaders in Apac local government had a low education level (52.9%) at the certificate level and were married (64.7). An insignificant number of women had attained a bachelor's degree.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics: Socio-Economic Factors and Women Leadership in Apac District

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Women Leaders in Apac Local Governance (LG) accept that they suffer hidden barriers to political participation	0.0%	5.9%	0.0%	11.8%	82.4%
There is an equal number of men and women in Apac LG	41.2%	29.4%	0.0%	5.9%	23.5%
Men and women participate equally in decision-making in Apac Local Governance	11.8%	29.4%	0.0%	23.5%	35.3%
Women in Apac compete equally with men for open elected positions	47.1%	23.5%	0.0%	5.9%	23.5%
Women persistently feel that their work is devalued in the Apac Local Governance	5.9%	5.9%	0.0%	70.6%	17.6%
Women in Local Governance have the same qualification with men	5.9%	58.8%	0.0%	5.9%	29.4%
Women in Apac Local Governance are underdeployed	17.6%	11.8%	5.9%	23.5%	41.2%
Women in Apac LG often resign from their elected positions when challenged	23.5%	17.6%	5.9%	29.4%	23.5%

The findings in Table 2 indicate that 82.4% of women in the Apac district local government accepted suffering from the hidden barriers to their political participation. This was compounded by the under deployment into the executive positions in the leadership structure at 41.2%. 47.1% disagreed with competing equally with men for open elected positions.

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on Gender Stereotypes and Women's Political Participation

Gendered Stereotypes	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Voting women in leadership is determined by cultural norms and values	35.3%	23.5%	0.0%	0.0%	41.2%
Voters usually prefer men in leadership positions to women	17.6%	11.8%	5.9%	29.4%	35.3%
Unsupportive husbands/men discourage their wives from contesting because they become disrespectful	5.9%	5.9%	0.0%	41.2%	47.1%
Voters feel that women leaders do not influence decisions	23.5%	29.4%	0.0%	29.4%	17.6%
Male leaders provide more security to their voters compared to female leaders	0.0%	35.3%	0.0%	17.6%	47.1%
Women do not have the economic resources to canvas votes	5.9%	11.8%	0.0%	29.4%	52.9%
Women prefer voting for fellow females for leadership positions	11.8%	23.5%	0.0%	23.5%	41.2%
Culturally, males are nurtured to be leaders compared to females	35.3%	5.9%	0.0%	35.3%	23.5%
Leadership makes women neglect their gender roles	47.1%	29.4%	5.9%	11.8%	5.9%
Fear of domestic violence limits women's participation in politics	5.9%	17.6%	0.0%	41.2%	35.3%

The researchers found that the outstanding socio-economic limitations to women's political participation were: inadequate economic resources to canvas votes (52.9%), voters' preference for male leaders for security reasons (47.1%), unsupportive spouses (47.1%) and cultural norms and values in leadership (41.2%).

Table 4: Correlation Coefficient between Political Glass Ceiling and Women's Political Leadership

		Political Glass Ceiling	Gendered cultural beliefs (intrinsic and extrinsic) that limit women's political participation	Implications of the Political Glass Ceiling on Women Leaders	Opportunities for women's political participation (Indicators for women's political success)	Strategies to enhance women's political participation
Political Glass Ceiling	Pearson Correlation	1	-.280	.226	.661**	.670**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.276	.383	.004	.003
Gendered cultural beliefs (intrinsic and extrinsic) that limit women's political participation	Pearson Correlation	-.280	1	-.026	-.432	-.540*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.276		.921	.083	.025
Implications of the Political Glass Ceiling on Women Leaders	Pearson Correlation	.226	-.026	1	.236	.168
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.383	.921		.363	.520

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424

		Political Glass Ceiling	Gendered cultural beliefs (intrinsic and extrinsic) that limit women's political participation	Implications of the Political Glass Ceiling on Women Leaders	Opportunities for women's political participation (Indicators for women's political success)	Strategies to enhance women's political participation
Opportunities for women's political participation (Indicators for women's political success)	Pearson Correlation	.661**	-.432	.236	1	.768**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.083	.363		.000
Strategies to enhance women's political participation	Pearson Correlation	.670**	-.540*	.168	.768**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.025	.520	.000	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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

The researchers found that enhancing women's political participation positively influences the glass ceiling (hidden barriers), thereby limiting women in local leadership activities by 67% and at a 0.03 level of significance. Breaking the political glass ceiling had a very strong relationship with women's opportunities for political participation by 76% and (0.000) significant level. However, a moderate negative relationship at 54% (0.025) exists between the existing gendered cultural beliefs and norms and women's political participation.

DISCUSSION

The researchers used the congruity theory propounded by Eagly and Karau to analyse the prejudice against women in leadership participation in elected positions in the Apac district. The congruity theory opines that prejudice against women stems from a perceived inconsistency between the feminine gender role and the masculine stereotype of a leader (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This theory suggests that society's stereotypes lead to two forms of bias: women are seen as less suitable for leadership, and their leadership behaviours are evaluated more negatively than men's, making it harder for them to attain and succeed in leadership positions. In the Apac district, the researchers found that gendered cultural norms and beliefs negatively influenced voters' decisions to elect women into leadership positions. The finding underscores Eagly and Karau's argument on how prejudice influences the behaviour of leaders, leading to differences in how male and female leaders are perceived and evaluated (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p.18).

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424

Demographically, the researchers found that female leaders in the Apac district local government had low formal education attainment. Yet studies indicate that formal education is strongly linked to women's leadership by building skills like resource mobilisation and decision-making, boosting self-esteem, and increasing opportunities for higher income and social influence (Bhatti & Ali, 2021). Although education is a crucial foundation in building women's leadership, factors like practical experience, leadership development programs, and mentorship are also vital for women to advance into leadership positions and overcome barriers like underrepresentation in higher-level roles. These factors advantage women (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Thus, a political party engagement program, networking and continuous training fundamentally enhance women's leadership potential.

Besides low formal education attainment, the glass ceiling is a popular metaphor for explaining the inability of many women to advance past a certain point in their occupations and professions, regardless of their qualifications or achievements. The researchers discuss the current state of the glass ceiling in the Apac district, theoretically and a number of the key factors that contribute to the creation and maintenance of glass ceiling effects, including inadequate economic empowerment, cultural norms, sex preference, spousal support, gender stereotypes, gender discrimination and occupational segregation as outstanding factors that influenced voting women into politically elected leadership positions. Theoretically, this finding reverberates the prejudice component of the congruity theory by Eagly & Karau (2002).

The findings on the relationship between gender discrimination and women's political leadership is in agreement with (Khoalenyane & Enaifoghe, 2018) and Norris and Inglehart (2001), who observe that the discrimination of African women in political leadership has become a phenomenon which excludes the majority of women from leadership positions in the African political framework. Norris and Inglehart note that a fundamental problem facing the worldwide process of democratisation is the continued lack of gender equality in political leadership. That women represented only one in seven parliamentarians, one in ten cabinet ministers, and at the apex of power, one in 20 heads of state or government worldwide. In the Apac district, the researchers established that only two women were appointed to the district executive positions out of the 12 approved positions, thus affirming the findings of previous scholars. This finding does not underscore the significant strive made by Government of Uganda to promote women in leadership through a number of policies particularly, the 1995 constitution, the National Gender Policy (2007), Gender and Equity Strategy for Social Protection (2018) and the Local Government Act 1997 amended 2006 which, all provide for equal political representation and enhance women political participation through affirmative action as a disadvantaged gender. This finding contrasts with Jalalzai (2008), who observed a lack of methods to disentangle the potential sources of women's under-representation in leadership. Jalalzai emphasises further that women enter politically unstable contexts and in countries lacking political institutionalisation, frequently as members of privileged groups, which is not the case with Uganda as a country.

The researchers further established that inadequate economic resources limited women from effectively canvassing votes, yet politics in Uganda is rather an expensive venture. This finding is congruent with Johnson-Myers & Campbell (2024), who analysed the cost of politics and how money acts as a barrier for women in politics in the Caribbean. This study was conducted in the Lango sub-region with a patriarchal cultural practice. Thus, women lack control over household resources, hence a lack of economic empowerment. Johnson-Myers & Campbell studied the gendered effects of money in politics, in which financial constraints emerged as a critical barrier to women's political entry and participation. Their findings indicate that although

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424

some women managed to enter the political arena and win elections, they nonetheless find the costs associated with politics burdensome and a barrier to increasing political representation in the future. Therefore, lack of economic resources seems a fundamental limitation for women's political participation in many settings.

Gender stereotype was one of the fundamental factors that limited women's participation in elected positions. The gender stereotypes were linked to the patriarchal nature of Lango culture that upheld men's dominance and women's subordination. Khoalenyane and Enaifoghe (2018) opine that patriarchy is responsible for the inadequate representation of women in the African political leadership, and so are Igbolekwu et al (2023). These scholars viewed patriarchy to be associated with gender complexity because women are seen as inferior to men in the patriarchal African society. Its underlying foundations are found in the past socio-political, socio-economic, and socio-cultural cases which have guaranteed the subjugation, oppression and domination of women by men, while maintaining and respecting African culture and its societal values. Women's significant rejection from political structures and procedures downplays their efforts to challenge the underlying barriers, which guarantees the receptiveness of women, responsibility, political duty, authority, and responsiveness in the African political economy.

Using the congruity theory of prejudice (Eagly & Karau, 2002) enables us to understand how incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to two forms of prejudice: (a) perceiving women less favorably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles and (b) evaluating behaviour that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role less favorably when it is enacted by a woman. The role congruity theory ably aligns with the findings on the effect of stereotypes on the choices of leaders by voters in the Apac district, thus ascertaining the findings by Wells & Fleshman (2020) on how sex interacts with one's gender to contribute to leadership decisions. The researchers found that voters in the Apac district preferred men in leadership positions for security purposes, as opposed to the females, whom they regarded as naïve and less valiant to protect the subjects. To this end, the researchers extend debates on gender and leadership theories. Specifically, the social role theory, which suggests that stereotypes associate men with agentic and assertive traits and women with nurturing traits. This perception can lead to bias against female leaders who deviate from these roles.

An unsupportive spouse was one of the social barriers to women's participation in political leadership in the Apac district. Cheema, Khan, Liaqat & Mohmand (2023) found that unsupportive husbands in the patriarchal settings in Pakistan during political campaigns. However, the support returned two months after the elections. Their findings further indicate that households where both men and women are canvassed see the largest increases in women's turnout and additional increases in political discussion and men's practical support to help women in politics. Similarly, Shoukat and Awan (2025) opine that resistance from family and community support limits women's political participation despite the quota system intended to raise women's representation in Pakistan Government. The implication is that bridging gender gaps in political participation greatly requires men's engagement and support for women through the election process. In Uganda, since women make up to 53% (UBOS, 2024) of the total population, women ought to rally behind women candidates so as to attract more female participants in elected positions.

CONCLUSION

Leadership is a relationship of granting guidance and conceding, thus society in the Apac district must accept that women are deserving of leadership, and women must realise their rightfulness and full potential to lead. Implicit gender bias undermines women's participation in

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424

political leadership. The traditional gender norms of women as followers and not as leaders justified women's low participation in political leadership in Apac. Though the Government of Uganda passed affirmative action to encourage women in leadership, the process is unacceptably low in part due to manifestations of implicit gender bias, including traditional gender norms and role congruity in Lango patriarchal society. Gender stereotypes, the glass ceiling and discrimination remain real challenges for women leaders in the Apac district. The women who have achieved leadership roles are a testament to women's rightfulness and worth to lead, and their presence serves to encourage other women that success is possible despite the glass ceiling. For sustainability, the researchers advocate for concerted efforts from policy makers, cultural leadership, voters and academia to take on civic education as a strategy to promote economic and political empowerment, mindset change and glass ceiling breakthrough as strategies to enhance women's political participation. Although the local government structure in Uganda is uniform, this study was conducted in the rural district of Apac, located in northern Uganda, thus making it unrealistic to generalise the findings for Uganda as a country. A comparative study on the urban (municipal and or city setting would be necessary for generalization purpose.

Acknowledgement

This research was supported by the Government of Uganda through Lira University, Directorate of Research and Graduate Training under the Research Innovation Fund. Our research protocol was reviewed and cleared by Lira University Research Ethics Committee. We further acknowledge the cooperation of our study participants in Akokoro and Apac sub-counties and Apac District Local Government for administrative clearance and support.

We acknowledge the contributions of the research team who played significant roles towards this study. Mary Ejang was the PI of the project and was key in the conceptualisation of the project and report writing. Sarah Apio and Victor Okuna comprehensively reviewed the literature, Denis Obote handled the methodology and analysis, and Judith Akello Abal handled the ethical component of the study. Data collection was jointly undertaken by the research team.

Conflict of Interest

As the research team, we declare no conflict of interest in this study.

REFERENCES

Babic, A., & Hansez, I. (2021). The glass ceiling for women managers: antecedents and consequences for work-family interface and well-being at work. *Frontiers in psychology*, 12, 618250.

Badura, K. L., Galvin, B. M., & Lee, M. Y. (2022). Leadership emergence: An integrative review. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *107*(11), 2069.

Bernstein, S. (2017). The United Nations and the governance of sustainable development goals. Governing through goals: Sustainable Development Goals as governance innovation, 213-240.

Bhatti, A., & Ali, R. (2021). Women's leadership pathways in higher education: Role of mentoring and networking. *Asian Women*, *37*(3), 25-50.

Boyce, L. A., & Herd, A. M. (2003). The relationship between gender role stereotypes and requisite military leadership characteristics. *Sex Roles,* 49, 365-378.

Castaño, A. M., Zuazua-Vega, M., Stone, D. L., & García-Izquierdo, A. L. (2024). Are there Gender Differences between Skills and Job Performance in Public Management

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424

Positions? *Revista de Psicología del Trabajo y de las Organizaciones*, *40*(2), 119-129.

Cheema, A., Khan, S., Liaqat, A., & Mohmand, S. K. (2023). Canvassing the gatekeepers: A field experiment to increase women voters' turnout in Pakistan. *American Political Science Review*, *117*(1), 1-21.

Chisholm-Burns, M. A., Brandon, H. H., & Spivey, C. A. (2021). Leadership lessons from administrators, faculty, and students during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning*, *13*(10), 1306-1311.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design*: *Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach*, Sage publications.

Don, A. D. D. S. B. (2024). *Shattering Boundaries: A Case Study Exploring Challenges and Roadblocks Experienced by Political Women Representatives in Sri Lanka in Their Quest for Office*. University of Wyoming.

Due-Billing, Y., & Alvesson, M. (2000). Questioning the notion of feminine leadership: A critical perspective on the gender labelling of leadership. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 7(3), 144-157.

Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. Psychological Rottenberg, C. (2014). The rise of neoliberal feminism. Cultural studies, 28(3), 418-437.review, 109(3), 573.

Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2003). The female leadership advantage: An evaluation of the evidence. *The leadership quarterly*, *14*(6), 807-834.

Eckel, C., Gangadharan, L., Grossman, P. J., & Xue, N. (2021). The gender leadership gap: Insights from experiments. In *A research agenda for experimental economics* (pp. 137-162). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Galloway, L. (2022). *Leadership: Perspectives from practice*. Sage Publications.

Grangeiro, R. D. R., Silva, L. E. N., & Esnard, C. (2022). I broke the glass ceiling, now what? Overview of metaphors to explain gender inequality in organizations. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, *30*(6), 1523-1537.

Hakim, C. (2006). Women, careers, and work-life preferences. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, *34*(3), 279-294.

Hill, D. M. (2024). *Democratic theory and local government*. Taylor & Francis.

Hoover, A. E., Hack, T., Garcia, A. L., Goodfriend, W., & Habashi, M. M. (2019). Powerless men and agentic women: Gender bias in hiring decisions. *Sex Roles*, *80*(11), 667-680.

Igbolekwu, C. O., Arisukwu, C. O., Ani, J. I., Uwadinma-Idemudia, E., & Agbemuko, O. O. (2023). Women supporting women: A glass ceiling for women politicians in Ibadan, Nigeria. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, *25*(7), 5.

Jalalzai, F. (2008). Women rule: Shattering the executive glass ceiling. Politics & Gender, 4(2), 205-231.

Johnson-Myers, T. A., & Campbell, Y. (2024). The cost of politics: how money acts as a barrier for women in politics in the Caribbean. *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies/Revue canadienne des études latino-américaines et caraïbes*, 49(2), 220-239.

Josefsson, C. (2014). Who benefits from gender quotas? Assessing the impact of election procedure reform on Members of Parliament's attributes in Uganda. *International Political Science Review,* 35(1), 93-105.

Khoalenyane, N., & Enaifoghe, A. O. (2018). Analysis of socio-cultural impacts of women

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424

representation in African political leadership. *Gender and Behaviour*, *16*(2), 11409-11423.

Kuhlmann, S., & Marienfeldt, J. (2023). Comparing local government systems and reforms in Europe: from New Public Management to Digital Era Governance? In *Handbook on Local and Regional Governance* (pp. 313-329). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Koenig, A. M., Eagly, A. H., Mitchell, A. A., & Ristikari, T. (2011). Are leader stereotypes masculine? A meta-analysis of three research paradigms. *Psychological bulletin*, *137*(4), 616.

Kyohairwe, S., Karyeija, G., & Nduhura, A. (2024). Evolution of Local Governance in Uganda and Its Implications for Policy and Practice. *African Journal of Governance and Development*, *13*(2), 23-47.

Lindqvist, A., Sendén, M. G., & Renström, E. A. (2021). What is gender, anyway: a review of the options for operationalising gender. *Psychology & sexuality*, *12*(4), 332-344.

Meza-Mejia, M. D. C., Villarreal-García, M. A., & Ortega-Barba, C. F. (2023). Women and leadership in higher education: A systematic review. *Social Sciences*, *12*(10), 555.

Ministry of Local Government (MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT) (2014). Decentralization and Local Development in Uganda. The Independent Publications Ltd, Kampala

Ministry of Local Government (MOLG) (2023) Homepage info. https://Ministry of Local Government.go.ug/

Morrison, A. M., White, R. P., & Van Velsor, E. (1987). *Breaking The Glass Ceiling: Can Women Reach the Top of America's Largest Corporations?* Pearson Education.

Mwesigwa, D. (2021). Towards enhancing local citizen participation in Uganda. *Dynamics of Politics and Democracy* Vol 1, No 1, 2021, 15-28, https://doi.org/10.35912/DPD.v1i1.449.

Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2001). Women and democracy: Cultural obstacles to equal representation. *Journal of democracy*, 12(3), 126-140.

Northouse, P. G. (2025). *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. Sage Publications.

O'Connor, K. (Ed.). (2010). *Gender and women's leadership: A reference handbook* (Vol. 1). Sage.

Offermann, L. R., & Foley, K. (2020). Is there a female leadership advantage? In Oxford research encyclopedia of business and management.

Olsson, S., & Walker, R. (2003). Through a gendered lens? Male and female executives' representations of one another. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, *24*(7), 387-396.

Rohman, N., & Holilah, H. (2021). Elected without buying vote: woman candidate, canvassing, and programmatic campaign in the 2019 local legislative election. *Indonesian Journal of Political Studies*.

Shoukat, G., & Awan, S. M. (2025). Women and Politics: Empowering Women Leadership for Political Representation in Sindh: A Multi-Dimensional Analysis. *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences*, *6*(1), 60-75.

Thornton, G. (2020). Women in business 2020: Putting the blueprint into action. Available at: https://www.grantthornton.global/globalassets/1.-member-

Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2024): The National Population and Housing Census 2024

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.9.1.4424

– Final Report - Volume 1 (Main), Kampala, Uganda.

Weiss, J. (2020). What is youth political participation? Literature review on youth political participation and political attitudes. *Frontiers in Political Science*, *2*, 1.

Wells, K., & Fleshman, J. W. (2020). Women in leadership. *Clinics in Colon and Rectal Surgery*, *33*(04), 238-242.

Wetzler, E. L., Korenman, L. M., & Rylander, S. R. (2024). Gender Bias in Perceptions of Military Leaders: Hostile Sexism Moderates Men's Evaluations of Faces. *Sex Roles*, *90*(4), 552-564.

Wilhau, A. J., & Karau, S. J. (2021). Gender Differences in Entrepreneur Values and Venture Mission. *Journal of Business Diversity*, *21*(1).

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.