

# Women's Presidency in Africa: Enablers of the Uprising Voices

Gloria Nyambura Kenyatta\*

Political Science Department, University of Freiburg/ Arnold Bergstraesser Institute, 79110, Freiburg im Breisgau, Windausstrasse 16, Germany

\* E-mail of the corresponding author: [kenyattagloria@yahoo.com](mailto:kenyattagloria@yahoo.com)

## Abstract

A significant increase in female leaders at the national level occurred between the 1990s and 2000s, and Africa has not been left behind in embracing women leaders in national politics. Although women's presidencies have been uncommon globally, around ten African women have served as presidents either temporarily or through election systems. Their leadership has set the groundwork for subsequent female leadership in the continent, even though men dominate African politics. Based on secondary desk research, this paper acknowledges that women's presidency and involvement in African national politics is relatively new, and despite the persistent structural barriers that have been documented, which obstruct their involvement in politics, women's achievements so far cannot be ignored. Therefore, this paper maps the enablers of this positive shift from the past norm, with women serving in national positions, including the presidency. These enablers include the electoral systems, temporal special measures (TSM), political party nominations -based on gender balance, education, and civil society organizations' empowerment efforts. Further, the paper concludes by urging African states that have not yet established frameworks that facilitate these enablers to do so and enforce them. Also, the paper recognizes that promoting women's participation in national politics requires a nation's political will.

**Keywords:** electoral systems, female leadership, gender parity, political parties, national politics, quotas

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## 1. Introduction

Historically, women's presidencies have been uncommon (Jackson 1990). Sirimavo Bandaranaike was named prime minister of Sri Lanka in 1960; she became the country's first female politician (Jalalzai & Krook 2010). Subsequently, there has been a rise in the proportion of women holding senior executive positions, including the prime minister, vice president, and president. Additionally, they serve in the judiciary, the executive branch as cabinet ministers or deputy ministers, and local and national legislatures. Therefore, there has been a notable surge in the proportion of women engaged in local and national politics.

Although embracing women leaders in national politics has been slow, Africa has not been left behind. Table 1 below reflects that as of 2023, ten women have served as president in African political history, some via elections and others in temporary positions during dire circumstances. This group of female presidents has set the groundwork for subsequent female leadership in the continent, even though the African political space is male-dominated. Their leadership roles as heads of state have promoted gender parity in the continent. Gender parity is a concept that emphasizes both men and women having equal liberties, protections, and resources. It allows both genders to participate equally in public life while recognizing their differences and redistributing power and resources (Reeves & Baden 2000). Therefore, it is a concept that highlights the involvement of both men and women in public life and attends to their particular needs to alleviate inequity.

Regarding women presidents, so far, there are only four women presidents that have been elected democratically, namely, President Joyce Hilda Banda of Malawi (April 2012-May 2014), President Ameenah Gurib-Fakim of Mauritius (June 2015- March 2018), President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia (January 2006-January 2018) and President Sahle-Work Zewde of Ethiopia (October 2018- Present). Those who have served in interim capacities include Acting President Slyvie Kiningi of Burundi (February -October 1993), Acting President Ivy Matsepe-Cassaburi of South Africa (September 2005), Acting President Catherine Samba of the Central African Republic (January 2014-March 2016), Acting President Agnes Monique Ohsan Bellepeau of Mauritius (March – July 2012), and Acting President Rose Francine Rogombe of Gabon (June 2009–October 2009), and Acting President Samia Suluhu of Tanzania (March 2012- Present). As of 2023, there are only two female presidents on the continent: President Sahle-Work Zewde of Ethiopia and President Samia Suluhu, Tanzania's first female acting

president.

Table 1: Women Presidents in Africa

	Country	Name	Election	Office	Electoral & Quota Systems
1	Burundi	Slyvie Kiningi	February -October 1993	Acting President	proportional representation (PR) & legislated quota
2	South Africa	Ivy Matsepe- Cassaburi	September 2005	Acting President	PR & voluntary quota
3	Liberia	Ellen Johnson Sirleaf	January 2006-January 2018	President	First-past-the-post (FPTP) & legislated
4	Gabon	Rose Francine Rogombe	June 2009-October 2009	Interim President	FPTP & legislated
5	Mauritius	Agnes Monique Ohsan Bellepeau	March -July 2012	Acting President	FTPT & no quota
6	Malawi	Joyce Hilda Banda	April 2012-May 2014	President	FTPT & voluntary
7	Central African Republic	Catherine Samba	January 2014-March 2016	Acting President	FTPT & legislated
8	Mauritius	Ameenah Gurib-Fakim	June 2015- March 2018	President	FTPT & no quota
9	Ethiopia	Sahle-Work Zewde	October 2018- Present	President	FTPT & voluntary
10	United Republic of Tanzania	Samia Suluhu	March 2012- Present	Acting President-confirmed as President after the death of President John Magufuli (she previously served as the Vice President.	mixed & legislated

(Source: Author's Collection 2023)

It is fascinating to witness such women serving as presidents, considering the deeply entrenched patriarchal systems in African society that continue to pose restrictions for women's involvement in politics. Given that governments in Africa tend to be male-centric and under male control (Ettang 2014), there are still significant disparities in the representation of women in governance roles. Therefore, the emergence of presidents in Africa who are women is relatively recent and portrays a substantial and positive shift from the past norms while the battle for women's equal say in the political sphere is still ongoing, but the progress made thus far should not be disregarded (Sadie 2020).

Over time, the proportion of women in politics has increased worldwide, with particular progress made in Africa. For instance, women's representation in lower house seats in African legislatures increased from 8 percent to 21 percent between 2000 and 2021 (International Organization of Parliaments [IPU] 2000; IPU Parline 2021). Further, according to IPU Parline (2021), the Southern Africa region had the largest percentage of women in the lower houses in 2021 (32 percent), closely followed by Eastern Africa (31 percent). North Africa was below the continental average at 24 percent, Central Africa at 18 percent, and West Africa at 16 percent. The representation of women varies significantly across national levels. According to the Africa Barometer Report of 2021 (see also Table 2 below), 61 percent of women are represented in the Rwandan parliament; thus, Rwanda leads the world. South Africa is in 12th place with 46 percent of women, and only three other states have more than 40 percent of women in parliament: Namibia (44 percent), Senegal (43 percent), and Mozambique (42 percent). Further, seven states have met the minimal threshold of 30 percent: Ethiopia (39 percent), Burundi (38 percent), Tanzania (37 percent), Uganda (35 percent), Cameroon (34 percent), Zimbabwe (32 percent) and Angola (30 percent). In addition, five countries have below 10 percent female representation; they include the Central African Republic (9 percent), Gambia (9 percent), Benin (8 percent), Nigeria (6 percent), and 6 percent in Burkina Faso (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance [IIDEA] 2021).

Table 2: Women in the Legislature (Lower House)

Rank (IPU)	Rank (Africa)	Country	Region	Seats	Women	%W
1	1	Rwanda	East	80	49	61%
12	2	South Africa	Southern	397	182	46%
15	3	Namibia	Southern	104	46	44%
16	4	Senegal	West	165	71	43%
19	5	Mozambique	Southern	250	106	42%
31	6	Ethiopia	Horn	547	212	39%
33	7	Burundi	East	123	47	38%
34	8	Tanzania	East	384	141	37%
37	9	Uganda	East	457	160	35%
39	10	Cameroon	Central	180	61	34%
47	11	Zimbabwe	Southern	270	86	32%
52	12	Angola	Southern	220	65	30%

(Source: IIDEA 2021)

### 1.1 Frameworks for Women's Engagement in Politics

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA), endorsed during the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, is associated with women's political participation. This Charter calls for measures to ensure women have the same rights and involvement when making decisions. The states are required to facilitate women's participation by establishing gender-balanced public administration frameworks, allowing women to join political groups, enhancing women's ability to assume positions of leadership, and boosting women's engagement in elections and other political engagements. Closer to Africa is the Maputo Protocol, adopted in 2003 and referred to as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. Among other things, Article 9 (2) of the Protocol urges states to make sure that women are represented more successfully and engage in making decisions across all tiers to eradicate prejudice against them.

Regarding the African regions, the Protocol on Gender and Development of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) ratified in 2008 in the Southern Region.<sup>1</sup> Articles 12 and 13 of this protocol demand fair treatment for women in every level of leadership settings, including both the public and private domains, through constitutional and other statutory frameworks, including affirmative actions. In essence, it gives the states directives to ensure that by 2015, women occupy at the minimum 50 percent of decision-making roles in the private and public sectors. In the Western region, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) ratified the Supplementary Act on Equality of Rights between Women and Men for Sustainable Development in 2015. This Act indicates a commitment by ECOWAS member states to promote gender parity in all sectors.<sup>2</sup> According to Article 11(1) of the Act, affirmative action policies must be implemented by state members to guarantee gender equity in positions of leadership within the public and private domains. In the Eastern region, the Gender Policy, which mandates that a minimum of one-third of the gender be represented at all governmental levels, was approved by the East African Community's (EAC)<sup>3</sup> Council of Ministers in 2017. Nevertheless, there are no frameworks for women's rights or gender parity in the Economic Community of Central African States

<sup>1</sup> The Southern African Development Community (SADC) comprises 15 states: Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, Swaziland, South Africa, Seychelles, Namibia, Mozambique, Mauritius, Malawi, Madagascar, Lesotho, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Botswana, and Angola.

<sup>2</sup> ECOWAS comprises 15 member countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

<sup>3</sup> The EAC consists of six member states: Tanzania, Uganda, South Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, and Kenya.

(ECCA)<sup>1</sup> and the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA).<sup>2</sup>

### *1.2 Structural Barriers to Women's Exclusion*

Despite the frameworks on gender equality, women still face exclusion in politics due to persistent structural barriers (Kenyatta 2013; Bouka *et al.* 2019; Kivoi 2014; Mlambo & Kapingura 2019). Men and women have been assigned roles based on gender through socialization, which are distinct and uneven in society. Men's roles are restricted to the public domain, such as decision-making and running society's affairs, while women's functions are limited to the domestic sphere, such as caring for the family and the house. This gendered "division of labor" differs in power dynamics because men make most decisions in the family, community, and country. Therefore, it is a patriarchal system that assigns males roles of dominance and women roles of subordination. Under such a system, women are typically expected to perform functions comparable to those at home, such as caring duties, when entering public areas.

In contemporary times, the role of women should go beyond the so-called 'traditional' ones to meaningful involvement in societal development. Liberia is an excellent example of the importance of women in positions of authority. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was the first woman of African descent to serve as president, elected first in 2005 and reelected in 2011 until 2017. She provided a solid foundation and excellent model for female leadership across Africa through her leadership (Ettang 2014). Her vast experience and renowned status at home and abroad attest to this. She was granted the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for promoting peace in Liberia. Further, she appointed women to several senior positions throughout her reign, including finance, administration, and trade ministers. However, the end of her tenure indicates a reversal of the progress made toward women's leadership in Liberia (Tulay-Solanke 2018).

Therefore, men become the directors of practically all public affairs, rendering them the public image of governance and political affairs, given that the two sectors cover every facet of power, including who is in charge, what power dynamics are in place, and how these dynamics are used through the patriarchal authority bestowed upon them by society.

## **2. Methodology**

This study is based on secondary desk research on female presidents in Africa. It scrutinizes women's involvement in politics across the space-time continuum, nationwide and regionally. It primarily focused on the factors (enablers) that allow women to take part in African national politics. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected from documentation on political parties, electoral laws and systems, governance frameworks and constitutional thresholds for gender parity, election results from electoral commissions in various African countries, and the electoral processes by the NGO and civil society organizations. The data gathered from various secondary sources was corroborated by triangulating, thus enabling this paper to address the research issue.

## **3. Findings and Discussions**

Women's presidency in Africa is relatively new, with the fight to get more women into politics still a work in progress. Various scholars have tackled the structural and functional barriers that hinder women's engagement in politics (Kenyatta 2023; Bouka *et al.* 2019; Kabira 2016; Tripp *et al.* 2014). Nevertheless, this paper acknowledges that despite these structural barriers, the achievements made so far should not be ignored, and the enablers for this positive shift from the past norm of having women leaders in national positions, including the presidency, should be enumerated. Thus, the following discussion focuses on the factors that have helped women's voices become more prominent in national politics, which we associate with the progress made in African countries. These enablers include the electoral systems, temporal special measures (TSM), e.g., affirmative actions, political parties (nominations based on gender balance), education, and empowerment efforts by civil society organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> ECCA comprises 11 member states: São Tomé and Príncipe, Rwanda, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, the DRC, Congo, Chad, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Burundi, and Angola.

<sup>2</sup> UMA comprises of five member states: Tunisia, Morocco, Mauritania, Libya, and Algeria.

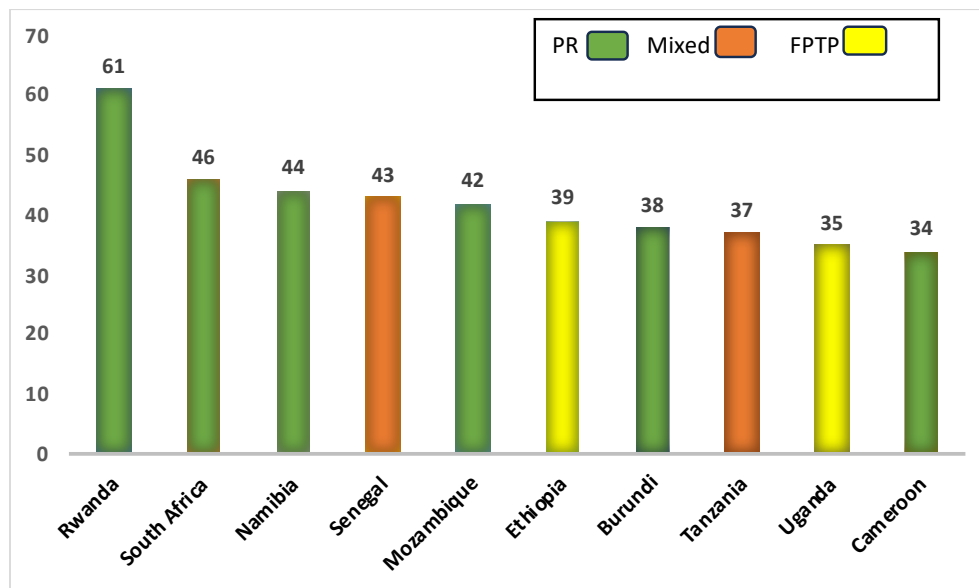
### 3.1 Electoral Systems

Three electoral systems are predominant in Africa: Proportional Representation (PR), Mixed Systems, and First-past-the-post voting (FPTP). Each system has its implications for women’s inclusion in politics. According to several studies, nations using proportional representation (PR) are more likely than those using other election systems to significantly increase the proportion of women serving in the legislature (Salmond 2006; Reynolds 1999; McAllister & Studlar 2002). This system is present in eighteen African countries. The PR model of elections, often known as the ‘list’ system, is considered powerful in inclusivity but poor in accountability. With this system, particularly the closed list PR model, women have a greater possibility of winning elections as opposed to the constituency electoral model. To bring balance to their list of candidates, the political parties may feel forced to propose a minimum of a few women (Jalalzai & Krook 2010).

Women benefit from the PR system because contestants concentrate more on the party and its ideals than on a specific person. The probability of female election winners rises significantly when the PR approach is combined with a quota. Furthermore, according to Thames (2018), party leaders typically have much control over list nominations under PR systems. As a result, they can create lists representing women without upsetting the influential and established incumbents. Because of this flexibility, they can more successfully fight for the support of individuals who favor female contestants without endangering preexisting interests. Therefore, the ‘closed’ list system is preferable to the ‘open’ list system because it allows the party to select the candidates’ order of appearance on the list, unlike the other system, where the voters decide where candidates appear. How the party list is put together is a crucial component of the PR system from a gender standpoint. Women candidates who rank last on party lists are unlikely to receive seats since the candidates are assigned the seats that the party has won based on their placement on the lists.

Figure 1 below depicts the association between women’s involvement in politics and election systems in the lower houses of parliament among the leading ten countries in Africa (IIDEA 2021). The PR electoral system is used in six of the top ten nations, which include the leading three: Namibia, South Africa, and Rwanda. While Uganda and Ethiopia have the FPTP system, Senegal and the United Republic of Tanzania have a mixed system.

Figure 1: Election Systems in the Leading Ten Countries in Africa



(Source: IIDEA 2021)

Subsequently, as per Table 3 below, the most popular electoral system in Africa is the First Past the Post (FPTP) system or the Constituency, which is present in twenty-three African countries. Under this system, voters select the party and a contestant to represent the party in a constituency that has been defined geographically (Tremblay 2007). But because this system strongly emphasizes individual contestants, it is a ‘winner-takes-it-all’ system in which a party may receive a sizable portion of the votes but still not have representation in the legislature. Regarding accountability, the FPTP system is robust, but it falls short when it comes to women’s representation.

As per Table 3 below, African women constitute 25 percent of the lower house, and this varies across countries with different electoral systems, with the FPTP system providing the lowest percentage of 22 percent. Consequently, it is a system that frequently heavily favors men against women because the contestant's resources, prominence, and networks all play a significant part in their success. Compared to other systems, this will likely subject female candidates to more scrutiny and decrease their prospects of winning office (IDEA & Gender Links 2021).

Table 3: Election Systems and Quotas in the Legislature (Lower House)

<b>Electoral System</b>	<b>PR</b>	<b>Mixed</b>	<b>FPTP</b>	<b>Total</b>
Number of Countries	18	10	23	<b>54</b>
Constitutional/legislated	26%	25%	25%	25%
Voluntary Party	40%	-	28%	34%
None	17%	23%	16%	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>25%</b>

(Source: IIDEA 2021)

An evolving phenomenon is the increasing number of states employing mixed systems combining PR and FPTP. Ten countries in Africa have a blend of both systems. Although there are multiple variations on how the process is undertaken, in this system, the so-called plurality method is used to elect the first group of contestants, and party lists are used to fill the remaining seats (IDEA & Gender Links 2021). In mixed models, women usually hold more PR seats than in the FPTP. This is because the PR system uses quotas more frequently than the FPTP system. Tremblay (2007) states that electoral systems play a fundamental role; however, they work best when combined with temporal special measures (TSMs) like quotas to enhance the number of women participating in politics. The PR system is believed to produce the fastest rise in women's political engagement. Makulilo (2019) and Anderson & Swiss (2014) assert that one of the reasons Rwanda has been an example of success for women in politics in Africa and beyond is the PR system. In recent times, the PR system has been chosen by the majority of post-conflict states. Finding a 'middle ground' involving FPTP and the PR models is becoming more popular. Some instances are the Constitutional Court's decision to re-examine the PR model in South Africa and a comparable request in Zimbabwe (locally).

### 3.2 Temporal Special Measures (TSMs) or Quotas

Temporal Special Measures (TSMs) are types of affirmative action or interventions that offer equal chances to both men and women. Therefore, these interventions can address selection discrimination, which is one of the main roles of political parties (Childs 2013). They symbolize inclusion and can, therefore, address the involvement of women and other marginalized groups in politics and other realms of society (Arriola & Johnson 2014; Tøraasen 2019). As a result, these interventions are crucial to women's involvement in politics. There are two primary forms of TSMs: constitutional or legislated quotas and voluntary parties. For the voluntary party quotas, political parties are required to submit a certain proportion of female contestants, while for the constitutional or legislated ones, seats designated for women and minority groups are reserved. Each of these quotas has advantages and disadvantages that must be considered before being implemented in any of the three election systems.

According to the Africa Barometer report of 2021, Twenty countries have affirmative action legislation, followed by eight with legislative and constitutional provisions and three with constitutional provisions (IIDEA 2021). Out of the 54 African countries, this accounts for 31 (about 60 percent). These provisions are found in the six African regions, and there appears to be an increasing desire for their inclusion, particularly in those going through constitutional reforms. Tunisia, Angola, Mauritania, Lesotho, and Algeria are among the countries with quota laws; Senegal, Rwanda, Morocco, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Uganda have laws about reserved seats for women (Sadie 2020). However, different processes are used by each of these states to elect members to the reserved seats. For example, out of the 113 reserved-seat MPs in Tanzania, fifteen are set aside for women and allocated across political parties according to the proportion of votes each received. In the most recent election, which took place in 2015, women also ran for the open seats; of the 264 constituency seats, only 25 were elected (National Electoral Commission [NEC] 2016). Therefore, women would have less than 10 percent of legislative



seats in the absence of the reserved ones.

Additionally, women are permitted to participate at the national level in Zimbabwe. Nonetheless, 91 more parliamentary seats (30 percent) are set aside for women and distributed proportionately to the political parties. Women's representation in the legislature scaled from 15 percent in 2008 to 33 percent in 2013 when the quota was implemented (Sadie 2020).

There are voluntary party quotas in ten African countries. Parties pledge to have either a 'zebra system' or 30 percent female representation on their party lists.<sup>1</sup> The South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) in Namibia, the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, and the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (Frelimo) in Mozambique are just a few of the states where quota systems have facilitated the large proportion of female legislators. These parties have dominated elections for the past two decades. But when these parties lose popularity, the opposition parties might not necessarily implement such a quota system, which means that general women's representation in the legislature also decreases (Sadie 2020).

According to the Africa Barometer report of 2021, the states with voluntary party quotas and PR models have the largest percentage of women, approximately 40 percent, such as South Africa, Namibia, and Mozambique. The lowest percentage of women, about 16 percent, are found in FPTP states without quotas, such as Botswana and Nigeria. Generally, in states where party quotas are voluntary, women make up 34 percent of MPs: 9 percent score more than those with legally mandated or constitutional quotas, and 18 percent score more than the FPTP states without quotas (IIDEA 2021). Therefore, the voluntary party quotas provide compelling evidence in favor of political party ownership and advancing gender parity ideals.

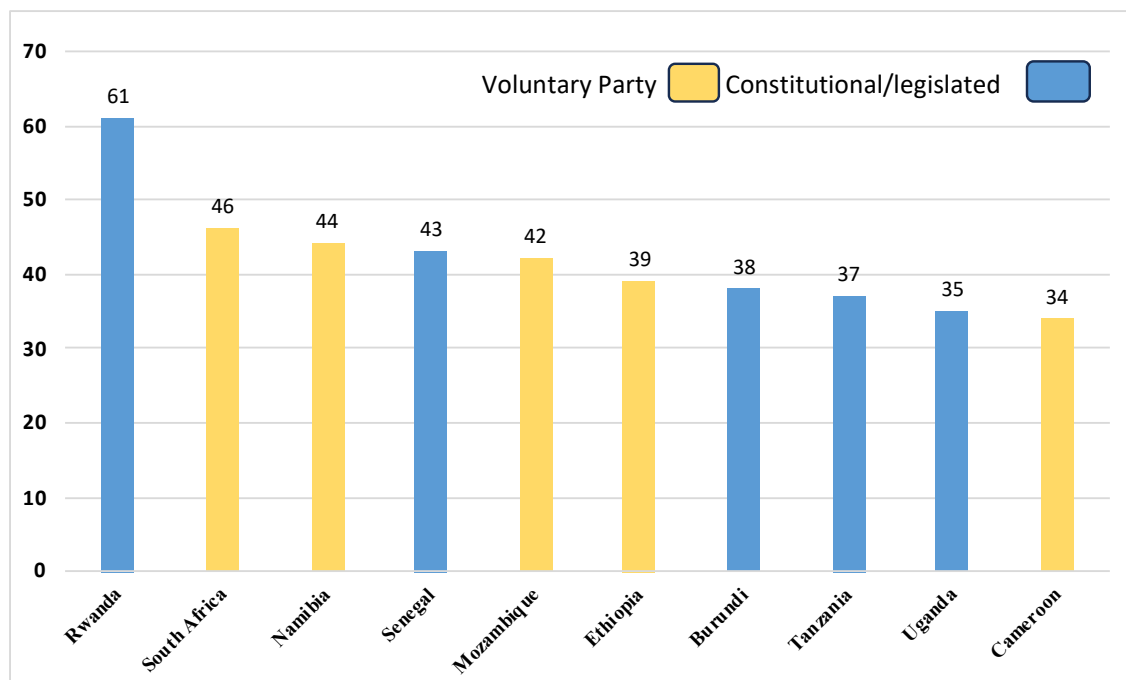
Various scholars have criticized the implementation of quota systems, particularly for women, for various reasons. These include the fact that the systems strengthen women's continued reliance on the quota provisions, serve as a means of sidestepping and appeasing women, or erect a glass ceiling that keeps female candidates from winning more seats than the quota or from being considered for the open seats (Wang & Yoon 2018; Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2010; Norris 2006; Tinker 2004). For women to hold leadership positions in politics, designated seats might be the only feasible solution in patriarchal solid communities such as those in Africa (International Foundation for Electoral Systems [IFES] 2018). Burnet (2012) discovered that the gender quotas in Rwanda have had a substantial effect on gendered conceptions about the public realm, given its history of a deeply embedded framework for ancestral politics. In general, quotas are not applied in African nations where women make up fewer than 15 percent of MPs. (Sadie 2020).

Figure 2 below shows a few of the top ten African nations with female lawmakers and their quota systems. They are divided equally between voluntary party and legally mandated and constitutional quotas. The lawful or constitutional quotas require political parties to include female contestants in the closed list system. This is an effective strategy and the most reliable method for reaching gender equity so long as it is strengthened. There is no certainty that women will be considered in voluntary party quotas; as a result, their representation may decrease if the party loses support. For instance, the proportion of female lawmakers (in lower houses) is higher in African states like Rwanda and Burundi than it is in democratic Western states like France and Great Britain, partly due to the usage of constitutional gender quotas, unlike many Western states that have voluntary party quotas in place (Tremblay 2012). Still, voluntary party quotas are equally powerful and effective. Also, a PR system that combines voluntary and legislated quotas leads to a significant proportion of women holding elected office (IIDEA 2021). They are also easier to implement under the PR or multi-list systems (Dahlerup 2003). Therefore, gender quotas are primarily acknowledged as necessary for women's participation in governance.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Zebra lists' denotes that the names of the male and female contestants are shifted, much like a zebra's black and white stripes.

Figure 2: Quotas and Participation of Women in Politics in African countries (top ten)



(Source: IIDEA 2021)

### 3.3 Political Parties (Nomination and Funding Conditions Based on Gender Balance)

Political parties are the key gateways for those vying for political seats (Kenyatta 2023; Jalalzai & Krook 2010; Sadie 2020). Therefore, it is suggested that these parties are essential to women's involvement in politics (Kittilson 2006; Paxton *et al.* 2007). Lawmakers and gender equity specialists acknowledge their relevance in achieving gender equity in politics (Kandawasvika-Nhundu 2013). Because these parties are gatekeepers, they select candidates for the party primaries. They, therefore, possess the capacity to either repress democratic institutions or influence and advance them through involvement and representation (Makulilo 2019). Women face outright antagonism, discrimination, and intentional exclusion in the absence of party support (Sadie 2020). Thus, political parties still have power within the party and play a crucial role as 'kingmakers'<sup>1</sup> (Kenyatta 2023).

Political parties in Africa choose, propose, and assist female candidates for public office (Kenyatta 2023; Makulilo 2019). Considering the involvement of women in politics, the procedure for contestants for electoral offices is essential since it allows them to compete for elected office (Hazan 2010; Yoon 2008). Therefore, if political parties are to encourage inclusive involvement of all genders and increase women's engagement, it is crucial to establish mechanisms that direct the decision-making processes, particularly about gender equity. There are two nomination procedures: formal (rule-oriented) and informal (Lovenduski & Norris 1993). The legal procedures set standards for the minimum number of female contestants that the party must nominate, while the informal procedures have no limits defined.

Given that political parties in most African countries are thought to be patriarchal establishments that are male-dominated (Kenyatta 2023; Sadie 2020; Kassilly & Onkware 2010; Kanogo 2005), they pose a serious obstacle to women entering the political sphere, and because the formal nomination system has open procedures, there is a greater chance that it will increase the number of women participating. Therefore, women can claim these

<sup>1</sup> These are people or organizations which can affect their dependents' vote patterns to elect leaders because they have direct ties to societies and community actors, hold power over resources and exercise moral authority (Koter 2013)

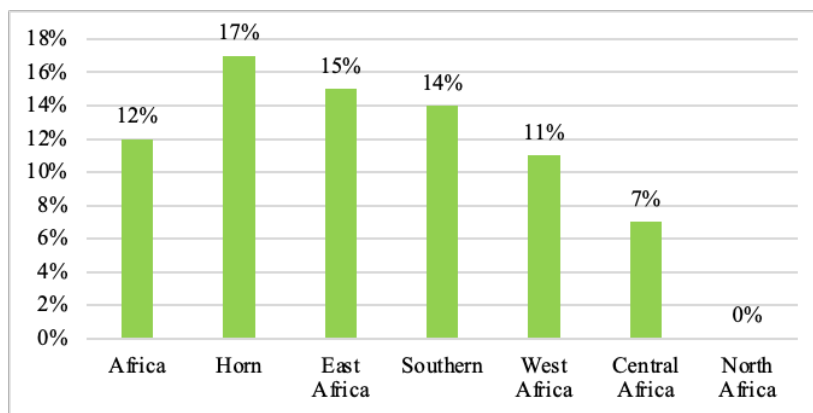


positions and hold their parties accountable for their lack of compliance. Thus, the political system’s institutional components are essential to promoting women in politics (Jalalzai & Krook 2010).

Women occupy posts with little influence on decision-making, like deputies, whereas men predominate in party leadership (Kenyatta 2023; Sadie 2020; IIDEA 2021). Moreover, women are less inclined to hold prominent political positions because they participate more at lower levels (Longwe 2000). According to the Africa Barometer Report of 2021, On the one hand, all countries—even those where women’s involvement in parliament has reached 40 percent or more—have male domination in the upper echelons of their political parties; however, on the other hand, more and more parties are revising their laws—either willingly or in compliance with state requirements (IIDEA 2021). Political parties are crucial in internalizing and domesticating the constitutional and legislated quotas. While several political parties have set quotas on the percentage of female legislators, these quotas are not always applied within party structures. Women are not sufficiently represented in political party leadership positions, such as party leaders, secretary generals, and their deputies, as evidenced by the leadership frameworks of the major opposing and governing parties in Africa.

Figure 3 below shows that women hold 12 percent of party leadership seats in Africa, indicating that women are underrepresented in the political party administration. While there are differences between the regions in Africa, from 0 percent in North Africa to 17 percent in the Horn of Africa. Consequently, it shows a party’s lack of dedication to advancing gender equity when it fails to ensure that women hold senior roles. When women have positions of decision-making authority, these are powerful roles that encourage and empower them to engage in politics. Therefore, women need to hold top leadership positions in political parties as such offices serve as training grounds for local and national politics.

Figure 3: Women in Political Party Leadership



(Source: IIDEA 2021)

Thirty-three African countries have women’s quotas either legislated or in the constitution (IIDEA 2021). However, these quotas are often not implemented because they are not included in the party policies. Examining the gender parity of the governing and opposing political parties in Africa reveals that most of them have not matched their policies and practices to the legally mandated gender parity obligations of their respective governments. So far, just twenty political parties in Africa have formally instituted quotas in their policies. Table 4 below shows the top eleven countries regarding women’s involvement in politics and the status of inclusion of the quotas in their political parties’ manifestos. Therefore, the proportion of women in leadership positions and the countries where political parties have institutionalized quotas are directly correlated. While including these quotas in political parties’ policies and practices shows a commitment to gender balance, there is not enough strict implementation. Thus, parties continue to be crucial platforms for elected seats, and because of their influence as ‘kingmakers,’ their application of the gender concept has a substantial effect on women’s political engagement. Therefore, these parties should include provisions encouraging women to run for office, such as quotas on nominating women contestants and those holding senior positions in top party structures.

Table 4: Political Parties and the Incorporation of Constituted/Legislated Quotas (Top eleven African countries)

Country	Constitutional/legislated quota	Included in political party manifesto/constitution	National % of women
Rwanda	30%	Governing RFP- Inkotanyi, Minority PDC (30%)	61%
Senegal	50%	Minority SSP (30%)	43%
Burundi	30%	No	38%
Tanzania	30%	Governing CCM (50%)	37%
Uganda	33%	No	35%
Angola	30%	Governing MPLA (30%)	30%
South Sudan	25%	No	28%
Egypt	25%	No	27%
Niger	10%	MNSD-NASSARA (10%)	26%
Algeria	20-50%	Governing NFL (2/5), Opposing HMS (1/5)	26%
Tunisia	50%	Minority RCD	26%

(Source: IIDEA 2021)

Apart from the existence of women leaders in the party, it is important to consider how bigger and smaller parties affect how women are represented in politics. Matland & Studlar (1996) state that smaller parties favor women's representation more than the larger parties that compete against them. The contagion theory explains that the smaller parties demonstrate this because no electoral penalties are associated with female candidates. Meanwhile, the larger parties might be under greater stress to increase the number of women because of concern that they would lose support to groups who want more women in politics (Matland & Studlar 1996). Further, Kenyatta (2023) states that women compete in smaller parties due to the fluidity, temporariness, and unreliability of political parties and coalitions formed pre-election. For example, it was difficult for President Joyce Banda to ascend to the presidency because of gender-based power disputes inside the dominant party she belonged to: The People's Democratic Party (Ettang 2014). Despite the conservative and predominately male nature of the party, she persevered and founded the People's Party in 2011, which provided her with a forum to discuss a range of public problems, including economics and governance. Later, after President Bingu wa Mutharika passed away unexpectedly in 2012, she was in a position to become the president despite fierce resistance from the ministers who backed the late president's brother, Peter Mutharika. Therefore, the support of smaller political parties is also essential because they are the key vehicles women choose to compete in despite being unpopular and resource-constrained.

### 3.4 Education

Education is seen as an invaluable asset to people in many African communities. However, because patriarchal cultures place a higher emphasis on male children, African women have faced systemic and intentional discrimination when it comes to education (Chege & Sifuna 2006). The colonial governments deemed that the domestic work carried by women did not require formal education. Furthermore, the social norms that guaranteed girls' systemic exclusion supported this idea (Kivoi 2014). Culturally, women were conditioned to do domestic duties like housework and were not allowed to pursue higher education. As a result, parents excluded their daughters from schooling and preferred to enroll the boys.

However, educating women advances the economic development of any nation. Further, women's political growth depends on the state of their finances and the level of education. (Jalalzai & Krook 2010). Jalalzai (2004) asserts that women who enter national politics are typically better educated and, in certain situations, have greater privileges than women in society. Education is the fourth goal of sustainable development, which urges states to promote opportunities for lifelong learning for everyone, including the girlchild, and to ensure an equal and inclusive educational system. Given this, it is recognized that education is an essential human privilege and crucial for developmental goals, but achieving it is an enormous task. Nevertheless, African states are attempting to educate their citizens to assist them in integrating into the community and in taking an active part in the

activities they organize.

Various studies have revealed a robust association between women's educational attainment and levels of workforce engagement with female lawmakers (Rosenbluth *et al.* 2006; McDonagh 2002). These two are the main elements for the 'eligibility pool' for the elective posts, and women rarely achieved them due to the societal norms that placed them on the lower scale of the social structure. A review of the female presidents who have served in Africa reveals that they have all passed the eligibility pool of attaining higher education and participating in the labor force. Therefore, with little to no education, women tended to work in low-paying jobs dominated by other women, while men took on high-paying positions (Jalalzai & Krook 2010). Furthermore, according to Eshiwani (1993), the preference for educating males over females stems from the assumption that men will receive greater compensation in the formal sector than women due to the presumptive link between education and employment in the realm of finance.

According to scholars, education fosters respect for the status quo and gives marginalized groups—like women—the confidence to question authority. For instance, research conducted in Kenya on 'Education as Liberation' to evaluate the politics and societal implications of an awarding incentives program for girls discovered that obtaining a high school education makes young women more aware of politics (Friedman *et al.* 2011). Ochieng & Jattani (2021) assert that for the previous 50 years, education and democracy have greatly increased in African nations. Therefore, women's education will be an influential factor driven by the push for the government to answer for its acts and resist the current quo: patriarchal norms. Thus, education is perceived as a tool that weakens the traditional classification attachments to gender. It is anticipated that women will rise to positions of greater social and economic status in states with higher socioeconomic growth, where modernization processes allow them to access education and paid employment; this can ultimately result in women having more political influence (Inglehart & Norris 2003).

### 3.5 Civil Society Organizations

The main proponents of women's political efforts throughout Africa have been civil society organizations, particularly women's rights organizations (WROs) (IIDEA 2021). These WROs are essential to law, culture, and constitutional reforms that support women's rights and political engagement. They continue to push for more women to be represented in and involved in politics (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] 2020). Many of these organizations help women interested in politics develop their capacities. In addition to lobbying and pushing for electoral quotas and election reforms, their work entails voter education, contestant training, gender audits of electoral processes, and assisting with tactical relationships with female lawmakers when they assume office. (Economic Commission for Africa [ECA] 2009; IIDEA 2021; IDEA & Gender Links 2021).

These organizations' capacity-building and advocacy campaigns sensitize the public on gender gaps and create momentum for statutory reforms. Additionally, they act as watchdogs on gender, the media, and elections and help mediate disputes. They are more critical in advocating for people-centered governance than state-centralized ones (IIDEA 2021). Civil society organizations are broad: women's organizations, charities, development NGOs, community groups, social movements, advocacy groups, professional associations, etc. However, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are among the crucial entities to support and facilitate women's political participation. (ECA 2009). Their advancement of gender parity and women empowerment is essential for attaining inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development.

Table 5 below shows that at least 80 registered NGOs are working on women's political participation (WPP) (IIDEA 2021). While nine of these operate Africa-wide. At the regional level, there are four in Central and North Africa, nine in the Horn of Africa, fourteen in West Africa, twenty-one in East Africa, and twenty-three in Southern Africa. These numbers are not comprehensive, but they demonstrate a link between increased female political engagement and NGOs that support this cause.

Table 5: NGOs in Africa working on WPP

Region	No of Organizations	Elections Monitoring & Observation	Lobbying/ Advocacy for Electoral and Policy Reforms	Capacity Building
Africa-wide	9	3	9	9
Southern Africa	23	15	19	12
East Africa	21	7	21	19
West Africa	14	8	13	1
Horn of Africa	9	5	7	6
Central Africa	2	-	2	2
North Africa	2	0	2	0
Total	80	38	73	49

(Source: IIDEA 2021)

Some of the civil society organizations that stand out continentally include the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA), African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), Make Every Woman Count (MEWC), Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF), the Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR), and Abantu for Development (IIDEA, 2021). Consequently, as CSO players are strategically vital in advancing the cause of gender-conscious electoral procedures, there is a need for stakeholders both in the domains of industry and government to create partnerships and collaborations at the regional and sub-regional levels with CSOs to advocate collectively at the continental scale.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that, while it is rare, women can participate in national politics and hold the presidency in Africa. Ten women have so far been presidents in Africa, and their leadership has set the foundation for future female leaders, whether in national or local politics. The participation of women in politics is limited because the power dynamics of gender in society keep playing a significant role in the political realm. Women's exclusion from politics and leadership has been historically complex in Africa, as shown by the conspicuously low proportion of women in positions of authority across the continent. In many African nations, the political sphere is still predominantly perceived as a 'man's world' and is unwelcoming to women; however, women are increasingly determined to venture into politics and occupy leadership positions. Also, although African states are signatories to various frameworks that commit to women's equal rights, much needs to be done to domesticate these commitments into concrete actions and enforce them.

Nevertheless, based on experiences from several African nations, it is clear that women's voices are becoming more prominent in national politics owed to various enablers that have been mapped by this paper, such as the electoral systems, temporal special measures (TSM), e.g., affirmative actions, political parties (especially, nominations based on gender balance), education, and the empowerment efforts by the civil society organizations, e.g., the Women's Rights organizations (WROs). These enablers, whether voluntary or legislated, have brought a positive shift in having women included and represented in national politics, including the presidency, compared to the past norm where women were missing in action. Therefore, advancing gender parity and women empowerment by African states through frameworks that promote these enablers is essential for attaining inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development. Further, a country's political will and commitment by the public and private stakeholders are necessary to actualize gender parity and women's inclusion in national politics.

Furthermore, since political parties in most African countries are the main conduits for political office and are used to translate statutory commitments on gender parity into practical action, they, therefore, matter due to their inter-party democratic processes such as nomination, selection and supporting candidates for political office and political competition. Therefore, there is a need for a comprehensive investigation of the power dynamics that play within political parties' governance structures, both formal (rule-oriented) and informal. In particular, the informal practices remain under-researched and have immensely contributed to party cultures (rules of the game)

that have institutionalized norms that influence both genders' political opportunities in politics and hence have made discrimination against women possible and acceptable in African society.

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**Ms. Kenyatta, Gloria Nyambura** is a doctoral researcher in political science at the University of Freiburg, Germany, and a research fellow at the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute in Freiburg, which focuses on the Global South. She is also the Deputy Clerk of Bomet County Assembly, a devolved legislature in Kenya. She holds a master’s degree in Rural Sociology and Community Development from the University of Nairobi and a bachelor’s degree in environmental studies- Community Development from Kenyatta University, Kenya. Her address is [kenyattagloria@yahoo.com](mailto:kenyattagloria@yahoo.com)