

This research set out to establish whether or not traditional gender role socialization is responsible for the low participation of women in Kenya's political arena. The objectives of the study were: To examine the effects of gender-role socialization on the potential of Kenyan women's political participation; to determine the perceptions of Kenya's public regarding women in politics; and to identify the current participation patterns of Kenyan women in political parties, workers unions and local groups.

The study was done in four districts in Nairobi. Data were collected from 200 study subjects using a standard structured questionnaire and analysed using the statistical package for the social sciences computer programme. The findings are presented using frequency and percentage tables, graphs and narratives.

The findings of the study indicate that the public is generally interested in what happens in the political arena and they keep abreast of these activities. However, all the female respondents intimated they have never offered themselves as candidates in political party elections. Their participation was confined to discussion of political issues at hand and voting in elections. A small percentage indicated that they also participate in street demonstrations. The study also established that women had a right to participate in politics and that a high percentage of the respondents would vote for a woman during elections.

The study concludes that while gender role socialization may influence the perceptions of the public, it is not the main hindrance to women's political participation and their visibility on the national political scene. There are opportunities for women to start their leadership quest in smaller organizations like trade unions, co-operative societies, social groups and political parties, but women have not risen to cease them.

This paper recommends that to increase the numbers of women on the national political scene, women should be encouraged to first seek leadership positions in the 'stepping stone' organizations to help acquire the requisite skills and confidence.