

Women participation in political processes in Uganda: Evidence from National Survey

Executive Statement

Women continue to shy away from political and authoritative positions despite well-grounded laws in place. Low participation of women in positions of power and influence continues to threaten the long-term attainment of the gender equality as they are taken advantage of in work places, homes and communities. Women are seen to participate in political leadership only in positions that are standing such the Women District representative, beyond which, women disappear as observed from the low membership in Parliament for directly elected constituency positions. This points to the need for more awareness and support of women causes in Uganda. This Policy Brief examines the status of women participation in political and leadership positions, trends, the likely impact and possible policy responses using data from the 2017 Uganda National Governance Peace and Security Survey Report.

Introduction

Women continue to be at the low end of the political and leadership roles. Limited presence in positions of power for women simply implies that marginalisation and limited recognition of women issues will continue to persist at the implementation and enforcement stages of the policy process and programmes. Uganda's political landscape has helped create an opening for increased women participation in formal politics (Ottemoeller, 1999). This is seen in the political representation of women at district level as directed by law. In addition, there is increased high level political appointments for women at ministerial level and high positions of leadership in Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). As of March 2019, there were 28 out of 80 ministers who were women- with 11 full cabinet ministers and 17 as Ministers of State, making it 35 percent which is higher than 20 percent in 2015 (GoU, 2018). Ottemoeller (1999) argues that the expansion of women's influence on formal electoral politics is partly because gender has become a political tool for power-seeking politicians rather than for creating change beneficial to women in general.

Therefore, this policy brief maps out the participation of women in politics and leadership positions, the likely impact and possible policy response.

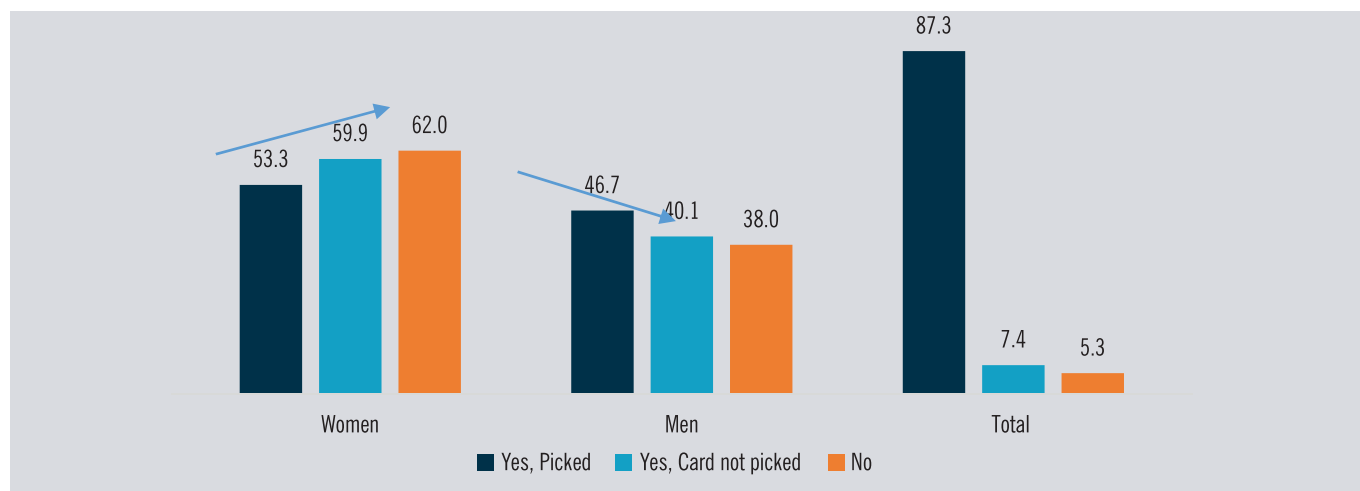
Approach

This policy brief heavily relies on the findings of the 2018 Report by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) that uses the National Governance Peace and Security Survey dataset of 2017. More specifically, special focus is paid to Chapter 5 of the Report on "Political Participation". In addition, findings and policy discussions also arise from the second Annual Gender Statistics Forum (AGSFII) held on 29th November 2018 at hotel Africana Kampala, Uganda and the perception survey conducted by UBOS in 2018. Data from the 10th Parliament is also utilised to provide more up-to-date information.

Key findings

More women than men participated in the national identification numbers registration process: Participation in political and leadership processes is only guaranteed when a

Figure 1: National ID registration status for persons aged 18 years by sex, %

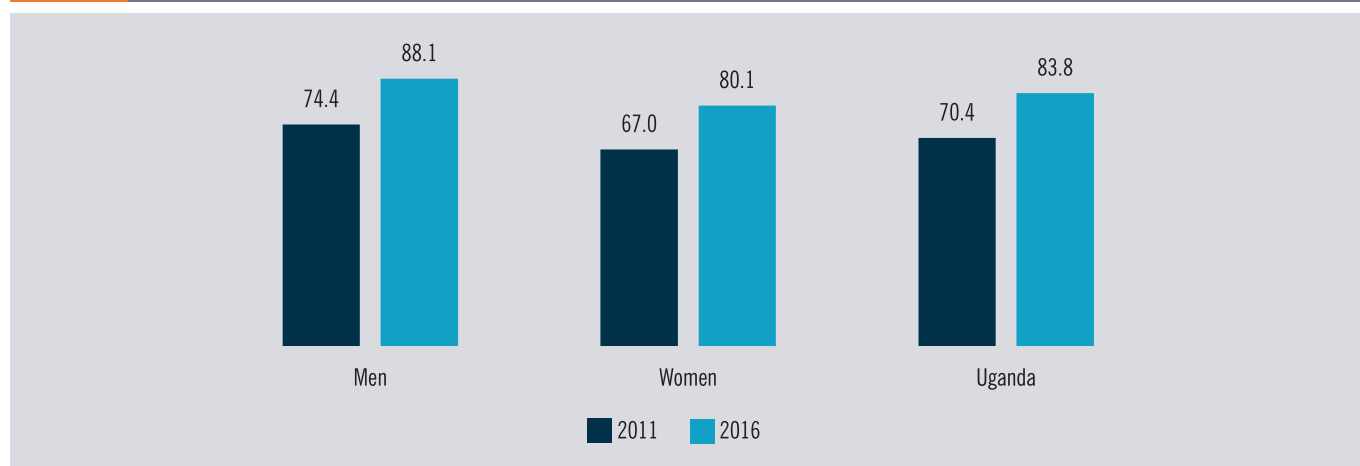


Source: UBOS, 2018

person is registered and owns a national identification number. Figure 1 shows that more women than men registered for a national ID and also picked it (53.3 percent vs 46.7 percent respectively). The findings also are maintained for the share of women who registered and did not pick their national IDs. That is for every 10 women, 6 did not register and almost equally for those who registered 6 out of 10 did not pick their national IDs. According to the perceptions survey, while most women indicated that it was the long distance to registration point as the major reason for not registering, men mostly reported that they were busy with other engagements.

Increased participation of women in voting processes during elections. One of the most fundamental forms of political participation is voting in regular elections, which for many people, is the primary means of participating in politics. Nationally, the share of persons aged 18 years and above that voted in elections increased from 70.4 percent in 2011 to 83.8 percent in 2016 (Figure 2). A higher proportion of men (88.1 percent) compared to their women (80.1 percent) voted in the 2016. This was as a result of an equally high participation in voting at the Presidential/parliamentary positions for men (83.2 percent) and women (79.5 percent). A similar pattern is

Figure 2: Share of persons who voted in the 2011 and 2016 elections by sex



Source: UBOS 2018.

observed for men and women in voting for LC V and LC III positions (UBOS, 2018). Generally, the participation of men and women in the voting process increased between the two election periods by an average of 13 percentage points (Figure 2).

More men than women were able to access electoral information and sensitised prior to the elections:

Effective participation in elections requires citizens to have information on voter registration, election campaign, polling processes, as well as on the records and platforms of candidates and parties. While, sensitisation is intended to create a climate of knowledgeable participation by the potential voters to cast their votes in confidence as well as makes people aware of the importance of their participation in the electoral processes. From Table 1, nationally in 2016, nearly seven in every ten persons (76.9 percent) aged 18 years and above were aware of their right to access electoral information and this was higher among men (76 percent) than females (64 percent). Generally the share of men and women who said they were informed on how to mark a ballot paper and sensitised on how to register declined between the two election periods (Table 1).

Women participation in directly elected political positions remains very low: Ensuring minimum levels of women representation in government has been achieved at least at district level. In the 10th parliament elected in 2016, there are 160 women out of 459 total members (Table 2). Of the 160 women parliamentarians, 122 are district women's representatives as mandated by the constitution, leaving only 38 women elected to parliament beyond the constitutionally mandated minimum terms. Of the directly elected members of parliament, only 20 women (6.8 percent) are women. Hon Jovah Kamateka, in the second Annual Gender Statistics Forum (2018) intimated that the low participation of women in constituency positions and politics in general stems from several challenges that act as barriers such as lack of/ limited education; social cultural upbringing i.e. men take lead in decision making; lack of support from the community; lack of finances to engage in politics, social economic empowerment is low and generally women lack personal choices. In addition, over 50 percent of men perceived that the low participation of women in politics stems from lack of support from party leaders and that women are not tough enough for politics.

Table 1: Electoral information and sensitisation for 18 years and above, 2011 and 2016 by sex (%)

Indicator	2011			2016		
	Men	Women	Uganda	Men	Women	Uganda
Aware of their right to access electoral information	78.8	70.9	74.5	76.3	64.4	69.9
Ability to check voters' register	76.4	66.9	71.2	86.4	77.3	81.4
Sensitised on how to register	87.6	83.8	85.5	86.2	81.6	83.7
Informed on how to mark ballot paper	94.8	90.9	92.7	86.6	80.9	83.5

Source: UBOS, 2018

Table 2: Composition of the 10th Parliament of Uganda Number and sex distribution (%)

Representatives by category	Number by sex		Total		Sex distribution	
	Men	Women	Number	%	Men	Women
Constituency (Directly elected)	276	20	296	64.5	93.2	6.8
District Women		122	122	26.6	0	100
UPDF	7	3	10	2.2	70	30
Workers'	3	2	5	1.1	60	40
Youth Representatives	3	2	5	1.1	60	40
PWDs	3	2	5	1.1	60	40
Ex Officio Members	7	9	16	3.5	43.8	56.3
Total	299	160	459	100	65.1	34.9

Source: Parliament of Uganda, November 2018

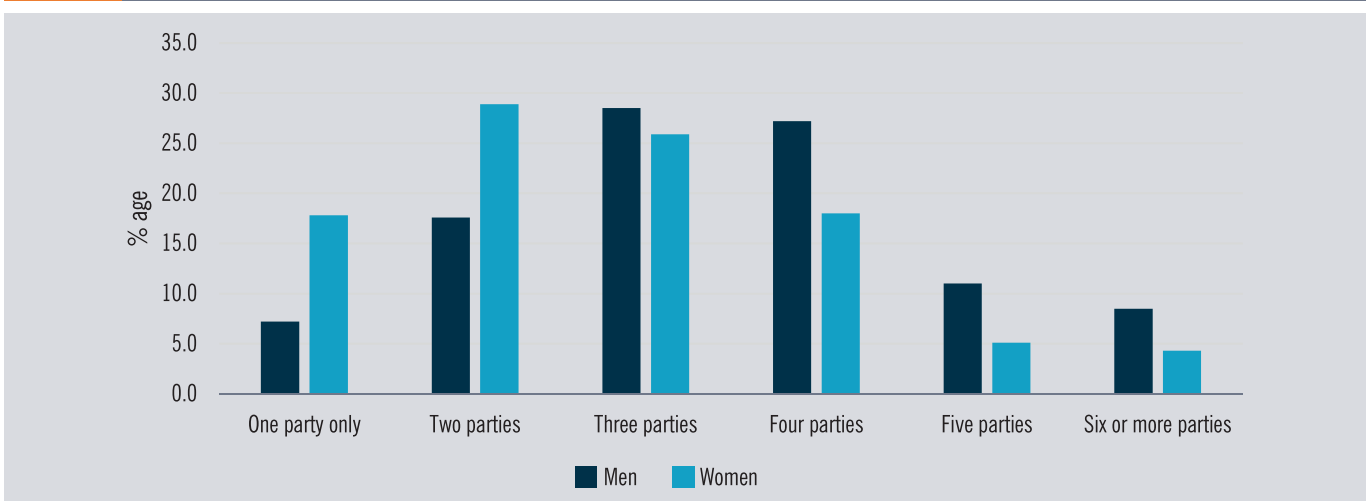
Strong patriarchal attitudes and practices continue to impede women’s participation in politics: Women face a myriad of challenges that prevent them from full and equal political participation and representation at the local level. According to UBOS (2018) and iKNOW Politics (2018), most common are: negative cultural perceptions and attitudes about women in leadership; violence against women in politics; lack of education and training; lack of access to knowledge and support networks; discriminatory election systems and processes; and lack of financial resources. That is women are subject to strong discrimination coming from deeply rooted patriarchal attitudes and practices where there is widespread belief that the public space is not meant for women and that by nature they cannot be good leaders. At least 53 percent of women said that women faced cultural barriers in participating in active policies (UBOS, 2018). These perceptions are stronger in local level politics, making it hard for women to contest and take up leadership positions. In Uganda for example, this practice is common and is often backed with claims that women might become “promiscuous” once they are given liberty to be active in the public space.

Women’s knowledge of existence of more than two political parties is still poor. Political parties provide the vehicle for the electorate to express itself by accommodating interest

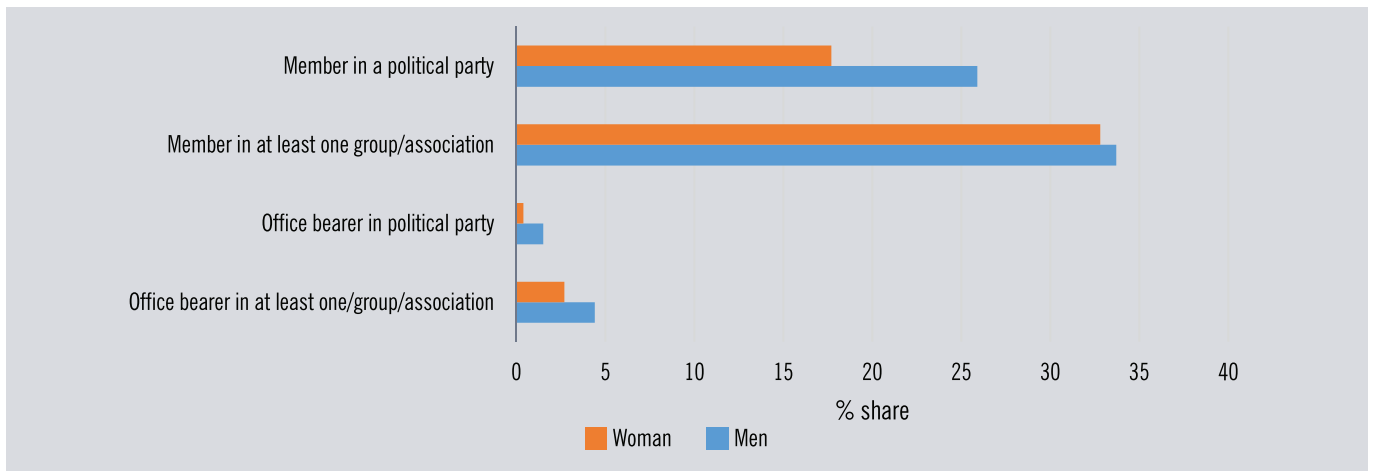
groups and offering voters different options. They are also key institutions for participation and representation, responding to the needs of the people. Knowledge is power. Overall, about one in every four persons aged 18 years and above (27 percent) could mention three political parties/organisations while only six percent could mention six or more political parties/organisations (Figure 3). Nearly two in every ten women (18 percent) could only mention one political party/organisation compared to one in every ten males (7 percent). However, more men than women were knowledgeable on the existence of more than two political parties in a country that has 29 registered political parties and organisations. Limited knowledge of political parties representation, limits participation as one doesn’t know which individual or organisation her views resonate with for better options in voting the right person.

Membership and office bearer in political associations or offices for women is not balanced to that of men: From figure 4, while membership in a political party is lower for women than men, membership in at least one group or association reveals less gender biases. In line with fining of representation in parliament, Figure 4 also shows that dismal women are office bearers in a political party implying that their being recognised at party level to take positions of leadership will continue to remain poor.

Figure 3: Knowledge of political parties by sex-2017, %



Source: UBOS, 2018

Figure 4: Membership in associations and groups by sex in 2016 (%)

Source: UBOS, 2018

Conclusion

Despite more women registering and owning national IDs, they are still not adequately participating in directly elected parliamentary positions other than those decreed by the constitution (women district representatives). Furthermore, we note that generally sensitisation and knowledge on how to mark a ballot paper generally declined but much worse among women. Participation and membership in political parties is still very poor among women. Even worse women's knowledge on the number of political parties in Uganda is inadequate as most know either one or two parties. This limits their choice stream on which party will present their ideologies better.

Policy recommendations

- **Decentralise NIN process.** The centralising of NIN has made registration and collection of IDs cumbersome. To encourage continuous registration and collection especially for persons who did not register before but were eligible; persons that have lost their IDs, and persons coming of age and must own IDs to participate in decision making, decentralisation of the registration processes is essential.
- **Review electoral laws:** Most educated versatile women are in public service. Therefore, there is need to critically review available laws and point out aspects that bar participation of women in leadership both at local and at national level. For instance, the closes in laws that inhibit persons in civil services such as nurses, teachers to participate in politics unless they have resigned should be

amended. In addition, there is need to re assure women of their old jobs in case politics fails. This might encourage women to participate in directly elected constituency positions.

- **Digitalise civic education:** In looking at various means of increasing social inclusion, strengthening citizens' voices especially women and their participation in politics, use of digital technologies can be explored. Nonetheless, introduction of digital technologies requires that citizens are provided with the necessary skills to use the digital space meaningfully. This includes offering basic education on use of social media platforms and the kind of content that can be posted for inclusion.
- **Use of women mentors to demystify the link between cultural and social norms and political participation:** Women leaders should nature women that are potential political leaders. In order to have continuity and growth, women role models must be fronted in schools and give motivational talks to young girls. The decision to be in position of influence starts from young girls' formative years and it is then natured. Thus, influential women in politics especially those who are both home makers and in political leadership positions have a duty to play in this area and in the long run can bridge the gap between culture/tradition and participation in politics.

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