

## ABSTRACT

Despite the increasing presence of women aspiring for elective leadership positions in most parts of the country, gender-based cultural victimization and discrimination continue to undercut women's struggles. Abagusii Community in the Nyanza region has never elected a woman to the National Assembly, apart from the Constitutional affirmative action where the Women Representative slot is protected by law. This study examined the Abagusii women's quest for political participation in Kisii County amidst the survival of patriarchy. The study was based on three objectives: to examine Abagusii women's participation in politics in Kisii County during the colonial and post-colonial period (1945 to 1992), analyse the participation of Abagusii women in politics in Kisii County during the multi-party politics in Kenya (1992 to 2017) and to assess the underlying challenges to Abagusii women's sustained interest in politics in Kisii County (1945-2017). Although the new Kenyan constitution (2010) encourages the engagement of women and men at all levels of administration and states that "not more than two-thirds of the members of elective public bodies shall be of the same gender," women are still underrepresented in political leadership in Kisii County. Currently in the ten constituencies in Kisii County, all the elected members of national assembly, governors and senators in the two counties are male hence it is clear that deep lying and persistent obstacles still deter the progress of women as compared to their male counterparts. The question of how women have been marginalised yet have continued to fill the space in the political landscape was explored using the Liberal Feminist Theory (LFT). Liberal feminists believe that "female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that blocks women's entrance to and success in the so-called public world", and strive for gender equality via political and legal reform. The study used a historical research design, and its direction was aided along by a qualitative approach. The interviewees were chosen from the 10 constituencies in Kisii County using snow-ball and purposive sampling techniques. During the data collection process, 80 respondents from the sample size were interviewed. Data was gathered through interview guides and secondary materials that were found in various libraries and online accounts. Thematic and content analysis were used to code and analyse the data that had been collected. The findings showed that Abagusii women in Kisii County have been involved in politics in a variety of ways since colonial times. However, a number of socio-cultural, economic, and political obstacles have inhibited actualization of their political interests since Kenya's independence in 1963. The government should be able to implement international conventions and the requirements of the Kenya 2010 Constitution in order to nurture gender egalitarianism in the political space. It was also argued that the interest in political participation and the desire for political leadership was overwhelming among Abagusii women that needs to be sustained through institutional reforms.