

Women's Parliamentary Representation in Uganda: A Relative Analysis of the Pathways of Women on the Open vs. Affirmative Action Seat

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Abstract : While women's parliamentary representation has increased over the years, most women contest the affirmative action seat (A.A). There is a lack of knowledge on why women prefer the affirmative seat vis- a- vis the open seat. This study argues that comparing women's path on the reserved and open seat to parliamentary representation enables us to pass judgment on why this trend continues. This paper provides a narrative analysis of women members of parliament's (MPs) trajectory in the open seat and Affirmative Action seat to parliamentary representation. Purposive sampling was used to select participants from the Northern Uganda districts of Kitgum, Pader, Oyam, Agago, and Gulu. The eight women MPs chosen for the study completed in-depth interviews exploring their qualifications, careers, and experiences before joining the political office, their party affiliation, and the kind of seat they currently occupy in the 10th parliament. Findings revealed similarities between women on the open and reserved to include; women generally irrespective of the seat they choose to contest find it difficult to win elections because voters doubt women's effectiveness as leaders. All women as incumbents find it difficult to be re-elected because their evaluation is harsher than that for men. Findings also revealed that women representatives are motivated by their personal lived experiences, community work, educational leadership, and local leadership. The study establishes that the popularity of the party in a given geographical location and the opponents' quality will determine the success of the parliamentary candidate in question irrespective of whether one is contesting on the open or Affirmative seat. However, the study revealed differences between MPs' experiences in the quest for the parliamentary seat, females on the open seat are subjected to gender discrimination in elections by party leadership, stereotyped, and are victims of propaganda in the initial contesting stages. Women who win elections in the open seat have to be superior to their male opponents. In other circumstances where a woman emerges successful, she may be voted for due to other reasons beyond capability, such as physical appearance or sociability. On the other hand, MPs' revelations on affirmative action seats show that the political terrain is smoother despite larger constituencies. Findings show that women on the Affirmative Action seat do not move to the open seat because of the comfort associated with the seat and maintain consistency, since the constituencies doubt the motives of representatives who change from one seat to another. The study concludes that women MPs who contest on the open seat are likely to suffer structural barriers such as gender discrimination and political recruitment bias instead of women on the affirmative seat. This explains why the majority of women contest on the affirmative seat.

Keywords : affirmative action seats, open seats, parliamentary representation, pathways

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