Impact of Gender Gap on Women's Participation in Politics

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the challenges and barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria, focusing on cultural, financial, and societal factors that limit their involvement in governance. The research highlights how deep-rooted gender norms, lack of financial resources, and institutional constraints contribute to the underrepresentation of women in politics. Using a qualitative approach, the study analyzes the perceptions of women regarding political participation and identifies the structural inequalities that hinder their inclusion. The findings suggest that overcoming these barriers requires policy reforms, financial support for female candidates, and cultural reorientation to promote gender equality. The study concludes that increased women's participation in politics is essential for national development and democratic growth.

Keywords: Women, Political Participation, Gender Inequality, Governance, Electoral Process

INTRODUCTION

Achieving gender equality and empowering women remain essential global objectives, despite the progress made so far. International human rights frameworks provide a strong foundation for protecting women and addressing gender disparities, yet additional efforts are required to fully realize these goals. One of the most significant challenges women face in public life is political participation, which plays a crucial role in ensuring equitable representation. Advancing gender equality demands a shift in power dynamics between men and women to foster inclusivity, active participation, representation, and accountability within democratic institutions and processes. Establishing a democratic society that champions gender equality necessitates a commitment to principles of non-discrimination and equity between men and women, as emphasized by major global agreements, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2017).

The participation of women in both elective and appointive positions in Nigeria remains notably low, despite global and national efforts to promote gender inclusion. The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, advocated for a minimum of 35% representation of women in political and leadership roles, a benchmark echoed by Nigeria's National Gender Policy (NGP). However, female representation continues to fall short of this target, persisting as a historical challenge from pre-colonial times to the present (Oloyede 2021).

Across the world, women constitute half of the population and make substantial contributions to national growth and development across various sectors, including business, community service, and politics. Yet, political leadership remains predominantly male-dominated, limiting women's engagement in decision-making processes. In Nigeria, several national concerns surrounding women's rights and visibility persist, as the nation struggles to align with international gender equity standards (Agbalajobi, 2010).

The underrepresentation of women in elective and appointive positions in Nigeria is an issue of growing concern. Despite the advocacy of governmental and non-governmental organizations pushing for increased political engagement, female participation still falls below the 30% affirmative action target outlined in the National Policy on Women's Affairs and the Beijing Platform for Action (Okoronkwo-Chukwu U., 2013).

Gender equality in political participation remains a contested issue both globally and within Nigeria. Although policies such as the 2006 National Gender Policy were designed to bridge gender disparities, implementation challenges have hindered significant progress. The 1995 Beijing Conference marked a pivotal moment in

advancing affirmative action for women, setting a 30% target for female political participation. Unfortunately, Nigeria has failed to meet this target in its 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023 elections, highlighting the need for stronger strategies to ensure meaningful political inclusion (Chigozie et al., 2023).

The credibility of Nigeria's democratic system has been called into question due to the underrepresentation of women in politics. A thriving democracy is built on principles such as liberty, justice, and the full participation of all citizens in political processes. However, excluding women from mainstream political engagement undermines these foundational values. Globally, women's political participation stands at an average of 25%, yet Nigeria falls significantly behind with just 7% female representation. This stark contrast highlights the urgent need for more inclusive political participation to strengthen democracy and foster equitable representation (Quadri, 2015). This study aims to analyze gender disparities in women's political involvement in Nigeria and propose effective strategies for bridging these gaps.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminist Theory

Feminist theories explore the ways in which women experience gender-based oppression, inequality, and subjugation, offering various perspectives and solutions to address these challenges.

Categories of Feminist Thought:

Liberal Feminism: This approach attributes gender inequality to restricted access to social, political, legal, and economic opportunities. It advocates for equal rights, education, employment, and political participation for women.

Radical Feminism: Radical feminists argue that gender oppression is deeply rooted in sexuality. They highlight how women's bodies are controlled through violence, objectification, and institutional structures such as religion and medicine. This perspective views sexism as one of the most pervasive forms of oppression and calls for the dismantling of patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality to end gender-based discrimination.

Marxist and Socialist Feminism: These theories suggest that women's subjugation arises from their exploitation through unpaid labor within families. Socialist feminists analyze patriarchy and capitalism as distinct systems that contribute to oppression, advocating for structural changes in family roles and equitable access to education, healthcare, economic resources, and political influence.
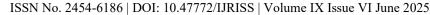
Empirical Review

Research has shown that over the years, the representation of women in political offices has increased, although the rate of growth remains slow compared to more advanced countries where women have achieved full political participation (Aiyede, 2016). In Nigeria, progress has been marginal across successive elections, with persistent gender gaps contributing to political imbalance.

According to Igwe (2012), political participation has increased across genders, with both men and women engaging in campaigns, debates, caucus meetings, voting, contesting elections, and holding political and party offices. However, cultural beliefs continue to restrict women's full representation in leadership roles.

Arowolo and Abe (2018) argue that the primary motivation behind political participation is the pursuit of power and control over resource allocation. In Nigeria, male politicians dominate decision-making processes, relegating women to marginal roles primarily centered on voting and party support.

Guzman (2014) further explains that access to political authority does not automatically translate to the promotion of women's interests. In instances where women hold minority leadership positions, their ability to advocate for gender-related policies is often constrained by dominant political structures. This highlights the need for greater female representation to amplify women's voices in governance.

Obasi (2006) contends that women's political success depends on their ability to build strategic alliances with

male counterparts to advance policies that support gender equality. The passage of gender-focused legislation requires political will and strong lobbying efforts to ensure support from both male and female politicians.

Suleiman (2009), in her capacity as the Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development, criticized the low level of women's participation and their marginalization in Nigerian politics. She attributed this to the unfavorable political climate in the country. According to her, women are discouraged from contesting elections due to political violence, male dominance in the political sphere, and limited financial capacity to run campaigns.

Similarly, Ogbonna (2009) identified key barriers to women's participation, contestation, and victory in elections. He noted that financial constraints and money politics often exclude women, as political participation tends to favor those with financial power. Additionally, the lack of financial empowerment among women, coupled with the prevalence of violence, including assassinations and violent confrontations at rallies, further discourages female political engagement.

Aligned with the stance of Igwe in 2012, the rate of involvement of the people in governance and related institutions of society is increasing by both genders only the areas of political representations of women are not fully cared for due to cultural beliefs in this part of the country. Both genders take active positions in the areas of political campaigns and debates, attending caucus or strategy meetings of political parties, voting during elections, standing as candidates for elections, and holding government and party posts.

In the political arena where female gender is representative of a political party and needed to pass a bill in the house. For that to take place, she needed to lobby for the support of the male gender to get the bill passed. (Dovi, 2006).

Asaze (2013) highlighted the negative impact of religious and cultural norms on women's political participation, particularly in Northern Nigeria. In regions where Sharia law is practiced, women are often not given equal opportunities to participate in politics. Women are discouraged from interacting with men in public, and in some cases, separate transportation is arranged for them, reinforcing gender segregation.

METHODOLOGY

This study examines the gender gap in women's political participation in Nigeria, guided by the principles of Feminist Theory.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Theory forms the foundation of this research, drawing from various disciplines in the humanities to explore the dynamics of male dominance over females. The theory emphasizes addressing gender inequality, particularly in the context of restricted political participation. It analyzes the cultural and social structures that reinforce male dominance in elections and public life. This framework highlights the subjugation of women and the challenges they encounter in a patriarchal society. Insights from this theory help to address the research questions by examining the societal norms that position men as dominant in political spaces, ultimately placing women at a disadvantage.

A quantitative research design was employed, as the study involved measuring variables in numerical form. The target population consisted of residents in Oyo State, Nigeria. Due to the large population size, the research was narrowed down to three selected local government areas. Respondents from these areas were chosen to explore the gender gap in political participation.

Simple random sampling was used to ensure that every individual had an equal chance of being selected, thus minimizing bias. An offline approach was used for distributing the questionnaires to further reduce potential bias. The study utilized the Likert scale questionnaire method.

A total of 300 participants were selected, with 100 individuals from each of the three local government areas: Ibadan South West, Ibadan North East, and Ido. The questionnaires were administered by three research assistants, with each assigned to one local government area to ensure consistency and reliability in data

collection. Responses were gathered directly from the participants, and the data was analyzed using the Chi-Square statistical tools.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Of the three hundred (300) questionnaires administered to selected schools, all were returned. This amounts to a 100% response rate. The results of the Chi-Square statistical analysis are presented in the tables below. This is to test four research questions.

Research Question I

Has gender a barrier to political participation?

Table I The mean of the respondents' views on gender being a barrier to political participation.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1.	Men take active role in politics than female	120 40%	90 30%	50 16.7%	40 13.3%	3.03	Accepted
2.	Women acts as second citizen in political representation.	125 41.6%	110 37.7%	30 10%	35 10.7%	2.98	Accepted
3.	Women are known for running mate (Deputy) in politics.	88 29.3%	96 32%	74 24.7%	42 14%	2.88	Accepted
4.	Financial capability of men over women in politics.	90 30%	95 31.6%	55 18.4%	60 20%	2.82	Accepted
5.	Women refer political participation as men's business.	100 33.3%	75 25%	65 13.3%	60 28.4%	2.87	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

All five items had mean scores above 2.5, indicating that gender is perceived as a significant barrier to women's political participation in the surveyed population. Cultural beliefs, role expectations, financial constraints, and societal perceptions all contribute to this barrier.
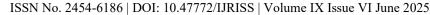
Research Question II

What are the cultural factors that have enforced the discrimination and marginalization against women over political participation?

Table II The mean on the respondent's view on the cultural factors that enforced the discrimination and marginalization against women over political participation.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
6.	Some cultures give no room for women in politics.	98 32.7%	87 29%	64 21.3%	51 17%	3.31	Accepted
7.	Some religion don't allow women to compete against men.	111 37%	76 25.3%	56 18.7%	57 19%	3.51	Accepted
8.	Women consider men as priority and not to context against.	99 33%	86 28.7%	64 21.3%	51 17%	3.07	Accepted

9.	Cultural superiority of male gender over female gender in politics	106 35.3%	102 34%	56 18.7%	36 12%	3.13	Accepted
10.	Some religions don't allow women voice as above mal e voice.	106 35.3%	114 38%	50 16.7%	30 10%	3.02	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The complete table reveals a nuanced understanding of the cultural factors influencing women's political participation. While there's a general agreement that cultural beliefs in male superiority, restrictions on women's roles, and limitations on their voices hinder their involvement, there's a rejection of the absolute statement that some cultures provide no room for women in politics. Additionally, the data suggests that religious interpretations and women's own perceptions of prioritizing men can also play a role.

The "Accepted" decisions for most items indicate a general recognition among the respondents that these cultural and religious factors act as significant barriers to women's full and equal participation in the political sphere.

Research Question III

Has money in politics hindered women participation in elective position?

Table III Mean and decision-making based on the respondent's view on how money in politics hindered women's participation in elective positions.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
11	Women lack enough money to run sensitive position.	77 25.7%	84 28%	87 29%	52 17.3%	3.32	Accepted
12.	Money in politics discourages women to represent party in election.	112 37.3%	88 29.3%	66 22%	34 11.4%	3.21	Accepted
13	Money in election leads to wider gender gap in political representation.	98 32.7%	88 29.3%	60 20%	54 18%	2.77	Accepted
14	Money to run election makes women to be running mate.	97 32.4%	112 37.3%	52 17.3%	39 13%	2.89	Accepted
15.	Women prefer vote selling than being a party candidate.	111 37%	76 25.3%	64 21.4%	49 16.3%	3.14	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The findings in this table indicate a general consensus among respondents that financial constraints in politics significantly hinder women's participation in elective positions. They believe that women often lack the necessary funds to run for important roles and that the overall cost of political engagement discourages them from contesting elections. Interestingly, respondents tend to disagree that money in elections necessarily widens the gender gap in representation. There's also an indication that financial barriers might make it harder for women to become running mates, and a concerning suggestion that some women might prioritize vote selling over active candidacy. In essence, the table strongly supports the research question, suggesting that money in politics is perceived as a significant obstacle to women's effective participation in elective positions.

Presentation of Hypothesis

Presentation of Hypothesis One

H_0: Gender inequality is not a barrier to political participation in Nigeria.

H_1: Gender inequality is a barrier to political participation in Nigeria

To test the hypothesis, we construct a Chi-square based on questions 1-5 from the questionnaire.

Table IV Chi-Square computation on gender inequality being a barrier to political participation.

Variables	N	Chi-Sq Calculated	Critical Value	Df	Alpha Level	Remark
Has gender been a barrier to political participation	300	49.91	26.3	12	0.05	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The calculated Chi-Square value (49. 91) is greater than the critical Chi-Square value (26.3) at a significance level of 0.05 with 12 degrees of freedom. Since the calculated Chi-Square value exceeds the critical value, the null hypothesis H_0: Gender inequality is not a barrier to political participation in Nigeria is rejected. Based on the Chi-Square test results, there is a statistically significant association between gender inequality and it being perceived as a barrier to political participation among the respondents in this study (conducted in Ibadan, Oyo, Nigeria). Therefore, the findings support the alternative hypothesis (H_1), suggesting that gender inequality is indeed considered a barrier to political participation in Nigeria by the surveyed population. The statistical analysis shows that the respondents' views strongly indicate that gender inequality is a real obstacle preventing women from fully participating in politics in Nigeria.

Presentation of Hypothesis Two

H_0: Cultural factors do not enforce discrimination and marginalization against women over political participation.

H_1: Cultural factors enforce discrimination and marginalization against women over political participation.
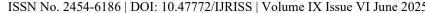
To test the hypothesis, we constructed a Chi-square based on the questions 6-10 from the questionnaire.

Table V Chi- Square computation on factors that enforced the discrimination and marginalization against women over political participation

Variables	N	Chi-Sq Calculated	Critical Value	Df	Alpha Level	Remark
What are the cultural factors that enforced the discrimination and marginalization against women over political participation?	300	77.2	26.3	16	0.05	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The analysis aimed to determine if cultural factors enforce discrimination and marginalization against women regarding their political participation. Null Hypothesis (H_0): Cultural factors do not enforce this discrimination/marginalization. Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): Cultural factors do enforce this discrimination/marginalization. A Chi-square test was performed using data from 300 respondents (N=300) based on specific questionnaire items (questions 6-10). The calculated Chi-square statistic is 77.2.The critical

Chi-square value (threshold for significance) at a 0.05 alpha level with 16 degrees of freedom (df) is 26.3. The calculated Chi-square value (77.2) is greater than the critical value (26.3). Because the calculated value exceeds the critical value, the result is statistically significant. This leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0). Therefore, the analysis provides statistical evidence supporting the alternative hypothesis (H_1).The data suggests that cultural factors significantly enforce discrimination and marginalization against women concerning their political participation.

Presentation of Hypothesis Three

H_0: Political expenses do not hinder women's participation in contesting for political offices in Nigeria.

H_1: Political expenses hinder women's participation in contesting for political offices in Nigeria.

To test the hypothesis, we construct a Chi-square based on the questions 11-15 on the questionnaire.

Table VI Chi- Square computation on Impact of political expenses on women's participation in contesting for political offices in Nigeria

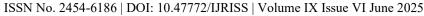| Variables	N	Chi-Sq Calculated	Critical Value	Df	Alpha Level	Remark
Impact of political expenses on women's participation in contesting for political offices in Nigeria	300	29.41	26.3	16	0.05	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The calculated Chi-square value is 29.41.The critical Chi-square value (the threshold for significance) is 26.3, determined using 16 degrees of freedom (Df) and a significance level (Alpha) of 0.05. The calculated Chi-square value (29.41) is greater than the critical value (26.3). Since the calculated value exceeds the critical value at the 0.05 significance level, the result is statistically significant. This means we reject the null hypothesis (H_0). Consequently, there is statistical evidence to support the alternative hypothesis (H_1). The analysis indicates that political expenses significantly hinder women's participation in contesting for political offices in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirm that gender remains a significant barrier to political participation in Nigeria. Women continue to perceive politics as a male-dominated arena, with cultural and financial constraints limiting their involvement. Cultural beliefs and societal norms reinforce gender disparities, preventing women from taking leadership roles in politics. Additionally, the high financial cost of running for office discourages women from contesting for elective positions, further widening the gender gap in political representation.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Government and Civil Society Collaboration: The government should partner with civil society organizations to launch awareness campaigns aimed at reducing gender inequality and changing societal perceptions about male superiority in politics.
2. Educational Reforms: Policies should be implemented to reduce the gender gap in education. Equal educational opportunities for girls and boys will empower women with the confidence and skills needed to participate in politics.
3. Cultural and Religious Reforms: There is a need to challenge and reform cultural and religious perspectives that reinforce discrimination against women. Efforts should focus on dismantling power imbalances between men and women in political and social structures.
4. Financial Support for Women in Politics: The government and political parties should establish funding mechanisms to support female candidates, helping to reduce financial barriers to political participation.

5. Legislative Interventions: Policies should be introduced to mandate gender quotas in political parties and elective positions, ensuring greater female representation in leadership.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can foster a more inclusive political environment where women have equal opportunities to participate and lead in governance.

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