

Women in Politics in Osun State, Nigeria: Challenges and Pathways to Inclusive Governance

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Abstract

This study investigates the factors constraining women's participation in politics in Osun State, Nigeria, and explores strategies for enhancing their involvement in politics. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population for the study comprised all eligible voters in Osun State, while the sample consisted of 600 respondents. The instrument used for data collection was titled *Women's Participation in Politics in Osun State Questionnaire (WPPOS)*. The data obtained were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. The findings revealed that the major barriers to women's participation in politics in Osun State include violence and thuggery during elections (93%), the cost of vying for political posts (91%), family responsibilities (89%), lack of financial support (87%), unemployment and poverty (83%), and the frequent night meetings of politicians (78%). Suggested pathways to inclusion include financial assistance and support for female aspirants (81%), educating and sensitizing women on the importance

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of political participation (76%), enactment and enforcement of laws against discriminatory practices (75%), and reduction of illiteracy levels among women (70%). The study concludes that addressing socio-economic and cultural constraints will enhance the political participation of women and promote inclusive governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Political participation, politics, gender; women's participation, democracy, political apathy, governance.*

Introduction

The engagement of women in political affairs differs globally, and their role in politics and the democratic process has become a crucial aspect of modern discussions regarding development and governance. Despite the advocacy for women's political empowerment by global organizations, studies consistently indicate that in numerous regions and countries of the world, women continue to exist on the periphery of the political sphere, with their involvement in governmental structures and the democratic process remaining significantly low (Okafor and Akokuwebe, 2015). In Nigeria, while women represent about 50 percent of the population and account for over 51 percent of electoral voters, they still do not possess the same political rights as their male counterparts (Okechukwu, 2022). According to Shumaila, Zaheruddin, and Kalthum (2016), the high level of inequality regarding women's prospective roles has intensified the political orientation of Nigerian society.

In their writings, Bako and Syed (2018) and Eniola (2018) concurred that colonialists oppressed women by limiting adult male participation to the wealthy and disenfranchising women under the 1922 Sir Hugh Clifford Constitution, which was generally regarded as introducing the first elective principle in precolonial Nigerian society. Erlich and Beauvais (2023) assert that colonialism significantly undermined the indigenous political structures in Nigeria, with the political dynamics concerning gender being no exception. Similarly, Farouki et al (2022) contended that the colonial experience in Nigeria was characterized by a male-dominated framework, as all colonial officials were men.

This period of colonial governance led to the dissolution of kingdoms and the dismantling of the dual governance system that permitted both male and female monarchs to coexist in leadership. Furthermore,

before colonialism, female leaders in various kingdoms experienced a decline in their authority and were excluded from the decision-making processes (Nwankwo, 2016). Consequently, it can be inferred that colonialism served as the primary catalyst for the marginalization of women in contemporary Nigerian politics. It is important to note that while elements of gender inequality existed in both traditional and stateless societies in Nigeria, the colonial regime exacerbated these disparities (Kim and Luke, 2020).

It is worth noting that the issue of gender imbalance and skewness of political and economic positions continued unabated during the post-colonial era in Nigeria. It could be recalled that both the Federal Executive Council, the National Assembly, and the Regional Assembly during regional government in Nigeria were dominated by men. All top and sensitive political positions were occupied by men, while women were relegated to the background politically. This trend continued even till the end of the military regime in 1999. Studies have therefore shown that Nigeria has been recording low participation of women in both elective and appointive positions from 1999 to date (Alliyu, 2016; Bako & Syed, 2018).

In a bid to increase women's participation in politics across the world, different treaties and protocols have been signed by governments of different countries, in which Nigeria is included. Nigeria has endorsed several international agreements designed to eradicate gender discrimination and foster equal opportunities for both men and women in governmental and other decision-making roles. Notably, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) affirms the voting rights of all individuals and requires equal rights for both genders. Other important treaties include the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which Nigeria's government ratified without conditions in 1985, along with its Optional Protocol in 2000, ratified in 2004.

Furthermore, the 1995 UN Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action urged member states to enact laws that prohibit discrimination against women (Adamu, 2023). Consequently, these treaties and protocols have prompted collaborative initiatives by both governmental and non-governmental organizations in Nigeria aimed at enhancing

women's participation in politics, aligning with the declaration from the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, which called for a 30% affirmative action (Nwankwor and Adebayo, 2021).

In a similar vein, the National Gender Policy (NGP) proposed a 35% affirmative action, advocating for a more inclusive representation of women, ensuring that at least 35% of both elected political and appointed public service positions are occupied by women. In 2006, the government implemented a national gender policy aimed at addressing gender disparities, particularly in the political representation of women. Furthermore, the national conference convened in 2014 put forth a strong recommendation to tackle systemic gender inequalities across various sectors, including politics, economics, finance, and agriculture (Eniola, 2018).

However, the percentage of women's involvement in politics in Nigeria has continued to decline significantly in spite of all the efforts made by governmental and non-governmental organizations to increase women's participation. Nigeria, the most populous nation in Africa, has continuously fallen in the world rankings, in addition to failing to make notable strides in the nomination of women to ministerial positions and in parliament. The democratization process that started in 1999 resulted in the election of three women to the Senate and twelve to the House of Representatives. After two additional electoral cycles, the Senate saw an increase in female representation to eight in 2007, but this number decreased to seven in 2011. By 2015, there were still seven women in the Senate, while twenty were elected to the House.

However, by 2019, the number of women in the House had declined to eleven. Overall, women's representation in both elected and appointed roles at the national level has remained around 6%, which is considerably lower than the West African sub-regional average of 15%. As of January 2021, Nigeria had only 10.3% of women in ministerial positions (three out of 29) and 5.8% representation in parliament, ranking 149th out of 155 countries in political empowerment. This is based on the 2021 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report (Oleyede, 2016). In sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria is 32nd out of 35 countries, ahead of only Chad, Mali, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

On the global gender gap index for 2021, Nigeria is ranked 139th out of 156 nations, indicating a 63% gender gap based on the average scores of the indicators that make up the Index: educational attainment (0.806), health and survival (0.967), economic participation and opportunity (0.687), and political empowerment (0.047) (Adebayo and Olutayo, 2024; Aremu, 2023, Olubela, 2023). In the present administration that started in 2023, the issue of female underrepresentation is still a great concern for female gender advocates. Out of 45 ministers appointed by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in 2023, only 8 of them were female. In the current 10th National Assembly, women had less than 5% of seats in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. At the State level in Nigeria, the issue of low female participation is also a big concern. The Table below shows the number of women in each of the Houses of Assembly in the six States of Southwestern Nigeria.

Table 1: Number of Women elected in the Houses of Assembly in the States in Southwestern Nigeria from 1999 to 2023.

State	Number of Seats	Number of Women Elected							State Total
		1999	2003	2007	2011	2015	2019	2023	
Lagos	40	3	2	5	7	4	3	4	28
Ekiti	26	0	1	0	4	2	4	6	17
Ogun	26	0	1	2	2	2	4	2	13
Ondo	26	0	1	1	1	2	1	3	9
Oyo	32	0	0	1	1	2	1	2	7
Osun	26	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
Total	176	3	4	7	11	8	11	17	76

Daily Trust (2023).

Based on the statistics presented above, it can be clearly seen that Osun State has been recording the lowest level in terms of the number of female representatives in the House of Assembly. A big question that has continued to resonate in the minds of all concerned individuals is ‘what are the main causes of females’ low participation in Osun State and the way out? It is against this background that this study aims to investigate the factors responsible for the low participation of women in politics in Osun State, as well as the ways of reducing political apathy among women.

Objectives of the Study

The study (i) investigated the factors hindering women's participation in politics in Osun State and (ii) assessed the solutions to the challenges confronting women's participation in politics in Osun State.

Research Questions

- i. What are the factors hindering women's participation in politics in Osun State?
- ii. What are the solutions to the challenges confronting women's participation in politics in Osun State?

Empirical Review

Oyekanmi and Pogoson (2021) investigated the patterns of women's involvement in Nigerian politics. The research was guided by four theoretical frameworks: Liberal Feminist Theory, Radical Feminist Theory, Cultural Determinism Theory, and Functionalist Theory. The content analysis revealed that cultural elements such as socio-cultural beliefs, attitudes, biases, stereotypes, and the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society, along with political issues like violence, thuggery, and intimidation, have contributed to a significant disparity in political engagement between men and women. To mitigate this gap, the study suggested the creation of gender-sensitive laws, policies, and programs, as well as initiatives focused on empowering women and decreasing electoral violence.

In a comprehensive review, Adamu (2023) examined the involvement of women in Nigerian politics, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities that affect the country's democratic landscape. The analysis, which utilized secondary data, identified several significant barriers to women's political participation, including religious and societal influences, the prevalence of violence and intimidation in the political arena, the financial burden of elections, arbitrary customs and regulations, women's perceptions of politics, a general disinterest among women towards political engagement, the potential for female leadership in Nigeria, and the inadequate enforcement of gender-related laws and agreements ratified by the Nigerian government.

The review advocated for the National Assembly to enact laws that would ensure the protection of women's rights and enhance their political involvement. Furthermore, it emphasized the necessity of empowering women through access to quality education and leadership training. It also suggested the establishment of platforms where women in leadership roles can share their experiences and challenges, thereby providing inspiration, motivation, and support to other women.

A study conducted by Olubela (2023) investigated the involvement of Nigerian women in politics, highlighting the historical and social obstacles they face. The research utilized a descriptive survey method. A simple random sampling technique was used in selecting 200 participants from three local government areas in Ogun State, Nigeria. Data analysis included frequency counts, grand means, and standard deviations. The findings indicated that the challenges hindering women's political participation consist of entrenched political systems, a lack of understanding of both formal and informal political norms, family obligations, financial constraints, and gender disparities. To enhance women's political engagement, the study recommended eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, ensuring equal opportunities for all genders, creating a supportive political climate, implementing empowerment initiatives for women, and establishing Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) focused on educating and raising awareness among women regarding political participation.

Adeyemi (2024) examined the involvement of women in Nigerian politics, identifying various obstacles to their participation and proposing solutions. The research utilized secondary data sourced from articles, journals, and online materials for analysis. Findings indicated that cultural beliefs, societal structures, financial constraints, violence, thuggery, intimidation, religious factors, and party dynamics hinder women's political engagement in Nigeria. The study advocated for financial assistance, cultural reform to enhance female participation, and capacity-building initiatives to empower women in both elected and appointed roles.

Chukwura, Nduba, and Izunwanne (2020) carried out a study on gender equality and the political participation and representation of women in Nigeria, employing feminism as the theoretical

framework. The study utilized content analysis and gathered data from secondary sources. The results highlighted that cultural norms, media representation, religious beliefs, financial barriers, and the electoral process in Nigeria significantly hinder women's political participation. The study proposed that the government collaborate with the National Orientation Agency and mass media to facilitate a cultural change that promotes female political engagement. Furthermore, they suggested the establishment and enforcement of laws that assist women in their political activities.

Bonu (2022) carried out a study that investigated the factors limiting the participation of Nigerian women in politics. This analysis adopted secondary data to examine the barriers to female political engagement in Nigeria. The results revealed that significant factors include the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society, the impact of colonialism, and occurrences of political violence. Additionally, the review pointed out efforts made by various administrations to improve women's participation, such as the implementation of the Beijing Action Plan, which requires that at least 30% of political positions be reserved for women, the creation of the National Council of Women's Societies, and the enactment of female-oriented laws.

The literature reviewed shows that the participation of women in politics across Nigeria is shaped by intersecting cultural, economic, and institutional factors. However, there are not enough localized studies that focus specifically on Osun State. This gap thereby necessitated an empirical investigation to examine the peculiar challenges and pathways to inclusive governance for women in Osun State, which the methodology section describes.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Political Theory

This study adopted Feminist Political Theory as its theoretical foundation because it questions how political institutions, social and cultural order, reinforce and create gender inequality and restrict access to women in leadership positions and spaces of decision-making processes. The theory argues that the political marginalization of women cannot be ascribed to individuals but to the structural

and institutional modes of patriarchy that favor men in politics and society. As a result, it provides an in-depth framework for explaining, interpreting, and correcting gender inequalities in politics (McAfee and Howard, 2023).

Feminist political thought can be traced to the work of Mary Wollstonecraft in her seminal work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which questioned the fact that women were excluded both from education and the right to become citizens. The twentieth century saw the development of feminist political philosophy that started with the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Carole Pateman, Susan Moller Okin, Iris Marion Young, and Bell Hooks, who broadened the critique of political theory to show that notions like justice and equality were traditionally built around male experiences (Pateman, 1988; Okin, 1989; Young, 1990).

Some basic Assumptions of the theory:

- i. Gender inequality is structural, as it is based on the structure of the political, economic, and social institutions.
- ii. Patriarchy is a system of dominance in which men have an advantage both in the world of business and in personal life.
- iii. Gender equality can only be attained by legal and institutional reforms, which are not enough, and cultural and social transformation is also needed.
- iv. Women are politically and socially subordinate due to economic dependence and class relations.
- v. The experiences of women vary along the lines of class, religion, ethnicity, and place; thus, gender discrimination is intersectional.
- vi. The private and the public are interrelated; the household relations and the family set-ups determine the extent of women's engagement in political life.

These are the assumptions that are echoed in the varied layers of feminist thinking. Liberal feminism focuses on abolishing laws and other forms of discrimination against equal opportunities (Okin, 1989). Radical feminism recognizes patriarchy as the main cause of women's subordination and requires social and political institutions to be changed (Pateman, 1988). Socialist feminism identifies gender oppression with the issues of class and economic exploitation and explains how women lack the opportunity to engage in politics due

to their financial dependence and poverty (Jaggar, 1983). The idea of intersectional feminism, elaborated by Crenshaw (1989), holds that the subordination of women is exacerbated by the factors of race, class, religion, and other social groupings. Another area of challenge by feminist theorists was the dichotomy between the public and the private, with a demonstration that the roles of a home and family also have a political implication (Young, 1990).

Relevance of Feminist Political Theory to the Study

When applied to the research under study, this theory provides a framework through which the aspects that limit the participation of women in politics in Osun State can be analyzed. It explains how patriarchal norms, economic organization, and cultural imperatives reinforce gender inequity and how institutions and politics reinforce these processes. Moreover, the theory also guides the discussion on the ways of achieving inclusive governance in the form of social reform, education, and the enforcement of policies.

Criticisms of the theory

Although it has made significant contributions, feminist political theory has been criticized because of its internal division and limited universality. An example of this is liberal feminism, which has often been criticized as being overly focused on legal equality and ignoring more structural and cultural obstacles, as radical and socialist feminists pointed out. Radical feminism has been charged with essentializing gender in that it assumes a universal experience of patriarchy that is not sufficient in describing the diversity of the lives of women. Marxist and socialist feminisms have been criticized for focusing on economic conflict over classes and neglecting cultural and symbolic aspects of oppression. Intersectional feminism fills a lot of these gaps, but it is faced with the challenge of maintaining analytical consistency when a variety of social categories are all factored into the equation at the same time (McAfee & Howard, 2023; Crenshaw, 1989).

However, the feminist political theory is still considered to be one of the most detailed models of understanding the underrepresentation of women in politics. The fact that it is able to merge structural, cultural, and economic explanations makes it exceptionally appropriate when using it to analyze the gendered aspects of political participation in Osun State, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population for the study comprised all eligible voters in Osun State. The sample for the study comprised 600 respondents. From the three senatorial districts in Osun State, two senatorial districts were selected using a simple random sampling technique. From each of the senatorial districts selected, 10 local governments were selected using simple random sampling techniques. From each of the 10 local governments selected, 30 participants were selected using a simple random sample technique. One instrument was used for the study. The instrument was titled 'Women Participation in Politics in Osun State Questionnaire'(WPPOS). The data gathered were analyzed using percentages.

Research Question 1: What are the factors hindering women's participation in politics in Osun State?

Table 2: The responses of Osun State residents on the factors that limit women's participation in politics

Factors limiting female participation in politics in Osun State		Yes (%)	No (%)
1	Lack of financial support	522(87)	78(13)
2	Cost of vying for a political post	546(91)	54(9)
3	Religious cultural barriers	378(63)	222(37)
4	Social perception of women politicians as prostitutes	312(52)	288(48)
5	Social views about women politicians as a gender that cannot be submissive to their husbands at home when they are in a position of authority	432(72)	168(28)
6	The belief that women politicians use terrestrial power to make their husbands submissive to them, to make them participate in politics	348(58)	252(42)
7	Societal perception that women politicians are touts and irresponsible	324(54)	276(46)
8	Violence and thuggery during elections	558(93)	42(7)
9	Frequent night meetings of politicians	468(78)	132(22)
10	Family responsibilities	534(89)	66(11)
11	Unemployment and poverty	498(83)	102(17)
12	Fear of sexual harassment	522(87)	78(13)

Author's Fieldwork, 2025

Table 2 depicts the responses of residents of Osun State on the factors that limit women's participation in politics. According to the Table, the factors that are limiting women participation in politics in Osun State are violence and thuggery during elections (93%), cost of vying for political post (91), family responsibilities (89%), lack of financial support (87%), fear of sexual harassments (87%), unemployment and poverty (83%), frequent night meeting of politicians (78%), social view about woman politicians as gender that cannot be submissive to their husbands at home when they are in position of authority (72%), religious cultural barriers (63%), the belief that women politicians use terrestrial power to make their husbands to be submissive to them to make them participate in politics (58%), societal perception that women politicians are touts and irresponsible (54%), social perception about women politicians as prostitute (52%).

Research Question 2: What are the solutions to the challenges confronting women's participation in politics in Osun State?

Table 3: The Responses of Residents of the State on the Solutions to the Challenges of Women's Participation in Politics

	Solutions to the challenges of Women's participation in polities in Osun State	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	Educating and sensitizing women on the importance of political participation	456 (76)	144(24)
2	Providing financial assistance/ support to female aspirants	546(81)	54(19)
3	Organizing programs to change the society's perception about women politicians to encourage their involvement in politics	486(69)	114(31)
4	Organizing programs to orient parents on how to educate their female children more than before, to boost women's participation in politics	348(58)	252(42)
5	Reduction of illiteracy level among women	420(70)	180(30)
6	Reduction of the fee for the nomination form and the electioneering campaign cost	348(63)	252(37)
7	Good societal perception about women in politics as responsible women in the matrimonial homes	378(68)	276(32)
8	Women already in politics should impact on the national development and be of good character to change societal perception about them	558(76)	318(24)
9	Enactment and enforcement of laws against discriminatory practices	450(75)	150(25)
10	Political parties and the electoral body should formulate policies that will encourage women's participation in politics	414(69)	186(31)

Authors' Fieldwork, 2025

Table 3 shows the responses of residents of Osun State to the solutions to the challenges limiting women's participation in Osun State. According to the Table, the solutions to the challenges limiting women's participation in Osun State are financial assistance/ support to female aspirants (81%), educating and sensitizing women on the importance of political participation (76%), women already in politics should impact in the national development and be of good character to change societal perception about them (76%), enactment and enforcement of laws against discriminatory practices (75%), reduction of illiteracy level among women (70%), political parties and electoral body should formulate policies that will encourage women participation in politics (69%), organizing programs to change the

society perception about women politicians to encourage involving in politics (69%), good societal perception about women in politics as responsible women in the matrimonial homes (68%), reduction of fee for nomination form and electioneering campaign cost (63%), organizing programs to orient parents on how to educate their female children more than before to boost women participation in politics (58%).

Discussion of Findings

The results of analysis of data on the factors limiting women's participation in politics in Osun State revealed that there is low level of women's participation in politics in Osun State because of violence and thuggery during elections, cost of vying for political post, family responsibilities, lack of financial support, fear of sexual harassments, unemployment and poverty, frequent night meeting of politicians, social view about woman politicians as gender that cannot be submissive to their husbands at home when they are in position of authority, religious and cultural barriers, the belief that women politicians use terrestrial power to make their husbands to be submissive to them to make them participate in politics, societal perception that women politicians are touts and irresponsible, and social perception about women politicians as prostitute. This result is in tandem with (Adeyemi, 2024; Christopher and Uki, 2020; Olubela, 2023; Oyekanmi and Pogoson, 2021) who all identified thuggery and violence, cost of election campaign, religious and cultural barriers, illiteracy and ignorance, gender discrimination, family responsibilities, among others as factors limiting women's participation in politics in Nigeria.

The results of data analysis on the solutions to the challenges limiting women's participation in politics revealed that financial assistance/support to female aspirants, educating and sensitizing women on the importance of political participation, women already in politics impacting in the national development and be of good character to change societal perception about them, enactment and enforcement of laws against discriminatory practices, reduction of illiteracy level among women, political parties and electoral body formulating policies that will encourage women participation in politics, organizing programs to change the society perception about women politicians to encourage

involving in politics, good societal perception about women in politics as responsible women in their matrimonial homes, reduction of fee for nomination form and electioneering campaign cost, organizing programs to orient parents on how to educate their female children on their rights and responsibilities to boost women participation in politics among others.

The results of this finding support the findings of (Adeyemi, 2024; Christopher and Uki, 2020; Chukwura, Nduba and Izunwanne, 2020) who found that various solutions to the challenges limiting women's participation in politics include financial support for women, addressing culture that limit female participation, capacity building for women, enlightenment and effective legislation against any form of discrimination inhibiting female participation in politics.

Contribution to knowledge

This study contributes to the ongoing broader discourse on women's political participation in Nigeria and Africa as a whole by providing localized evidence from Osun State, which is a state that has received limited scholarly attention. At the state level, it adds to feminist and governance scholarship by demonstrating how structural and cultural barriers interact to shape women's political behaviour. The study also offers relevant policy insights for designing gender-responsive political frameworks that can be adapted across other subnational contexts in Nigeria and Africa.

Limitations and Implications of the Study

This study was limited to Osun State, which restricts the generalization of its findings to other parts of Nigeria or sub-Saharan Africa. Also, some degree of response bias may have been introduced as the descriptive survey design relied on self-reported data. Despite these limitations, the study offers useful insights into the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers hindering the political participation of women at the sub-national level. The implications of the findings of this study for both policy and practice show that there is a need for state-specific interventions that recognize local realities, such as cultural and religious influences on women's political behaviour. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of financial inclusion and institutional

reform in achieving gender equality in political participation across Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study concluded that women's participation in politics in Nigeria is extremely low, and conscious efforts are needed by governments and individuals to eliminate factors responsible for low women's participation in politics, which in turn will boost national development. Enhancing women's political inclusion in Osun State is not only a local imperative but also a contribution to the broader African pursuit of inclusive and participatory governance.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of this study, the study recommended the following:

1. The government at all levels should enact laws that will eliminate all discriminatory practices that limit women's participation in politics
2. Male politicians, as well as husbands in various families, should encourage their wives to vote and also contest for elective positions.
3. The government, through the National Orientation Agency as well as nongovernmental organizations, should enlighten and educate women on their political rights and the need to resist any form of discrimination and marginalization against them.

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