

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECT TO WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF ADAMAWA STATE FROM 2015-2023

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines challenges and prospect to women participation in politics in Nigeria: A case study of Adamawa state from 2015-2023. Over the years women in Nigeria have been relegated to the background and are circumscribed within the political arena by culture, structures, procedures and ideologies that favours men. Party politics and the political process have not provided equal platform for the exercise of universal adult suffrage between women and their male counterparts, as regards selection, appointment and election of party members into various party positions. The paper adopted gender-oppression theory in its explanation. The paper utilized secondary information and found that cultural and religious discrimination affect women participation in politics and that low level of women education affect their political advancement. The paper recommends that Cultural and religious discrimination should be discouraged in order to encourage women participation in politics and that government should prioritized women education through adequate policies and programmes.

Keywords: Women, politics, participation. Government, marginalization.

INTRODUCTION

Since Nigeria was granted an independent political status from 1960 to date, women participation in politics is low. In spite of the remarkable population advantage of women, they do not enjoy full political rights as their male counterparts. Several factors combined to restrict women political participation in Nigeria. Makama (2013) emphasized that “Nigerian women, like their counterparts, around the world face a lot of challenges that limit their opportunities to develop their full potential on the basis of equality with men”.

Political parties have been dominated by men, no woman has ever been selected or elected to occupy top party position in any of the various political parties. The challenges on women participation in party politics is having immense effects on electoral and political process. The relegation of women in party politics has hindered the contributions, participation and political advancement of women. Adamawa state is characterized by multi-ethnic, multicultural, multi-religious, and multilingual set of people, therefore serious and mostly undue attention is paid to diversities such as where you hail from, what your beliefs are, what language you speak, your religious

and ridiculously your gender. These primordial affinities are often used as a basis for power acquisition, power consolidation, and of course power sharing.

Women find it challenging to participate in democratic politics due to the widespread issue of gender inequality in Adamawastate. Only very few women have ever attained the highest echelons of political office. The political parochialism in the district discourages women from participating in politics, and the adversarial imbalance has continued to rage their political flourish. The patriarchal system of traditional and sociopolitical systems denigrates the role of women in politics and calls for male dominance in the democratic politics. Women are completely excluded from democratic politics in the area because of the nature, customs and traditions, economic and cultural backgrounds of the political nomenclature, which completely limit their ability to survive politic.

Statement of the problem

Women's participation in politics has become an increasingly significant issue in global development discourse. Political participation, as the dependent variable in this study, refers to the active involvement of women in political processes such as voting, contesting elections, policy formulation, political leadership, and decision-making (Yusufa, 2022). The participation of women in politics is not only a matter of human rights but also an essential component of democratic governance and sustainable development (United Nations, 2023). Studies have shown that when women are involved in politics, they contribute diverse perspectives that promote inclusive governance, accountability, and gender-sensitive policymaking (Afolabi & Ghazali, 2021). Despite these benefits, women's participation in politics globally remains limited due to structural, socio-cultural, and institutional barriers.

In the African context, women's representation in politics has seen gradual improvement over the years; however, it still falls short of expectations. According to Clement (2022), patriarchal ideologies, cultural stereotypes, religious constraints, and economic dependence on men continue to restrict women's political aspirations. Although the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goal 5 advocate for gender equality and empowerment, women in many African countries face persistent discrimination in political leadership (Emmanuel, 2021). In Nigeria, the situation mirrors this continental challenge, where women constitute nearly half of the population but remain significantly underrepresented in elective and appointive positions (Akinsanya, 2023). The 2023 general elections revealed that women's participation was less than 10% of total political office holders nationwide, indicating a persistent gender gap in political leadership (INEC, 2023).

In Adamawa State, the issue of women's political participation reflects both challenges and emerging prospects. Culturally, the state is characterized by deep-rooted patriarchal traditions that often define women's roles within the domestic sphere, thereby limiting their involvement in public life (Mohammed & Buba, 2022). Economic barriers, inadequate

education, and lack of political mentorship further compound the problem (Garkida, 2023). Additionally, political violence, vote buying, and lack of party support discourage women from contesting political offices (Yohanna, 2022). However, recent developments show growing awareness and advocacy for gender equality, particularly through the efforts of civil society organizations, women groups, and international agencies promoting women's empowerment in Northern Nigeria (Usman & Yakubu, 2024).

The prospects for women's political participation in Adamawa State lie in the increasing educational attainment of women, youth sensitization on gender inclusion, and the rising influence of social media in political mobilization (Abdullahi, 2023). Furthermore, government policies and international interventions such as the National Gender Policy and UN Women's programs on women's political empowerment are creating new opportunities for women to engage in governance (Nwosu & Ibrahim, 2024). Nonetheless, achieving equitable participation requires sustained efforts in dismantling socio-cultural barriers, improving women's access to political education, and ensuring fair representation in political parties. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the challenges and prospects of women's participation in politics in Adamawa State, with the aim of identifying effective strategies to enhance gender-inclusive governance.

Objectives of the study

The research is aimed at examining the challenges and prospect to women participation in politic in Adamawa state. However the specific objective are to: to access the factors hindering women from full participation in politics in Adamawa state. Why socio-economic characteristics of women in the study area and how it affects their political participation. Determine the extent of women political participation and contributions to political development in Adamawa state from 2015-2023. Evaluate the effects of religious on women involvement and political participation/representation in Adamawa state. And examines the influence of culture on women political performance in Adamawa state.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Definition of Women

Reuben (2020) defines a woman as a biological and socio-cultural being whose role extends beyond reproduction to include active participation in social, political, and economic development. According to Reuben, women are central to the progress of families and societies because of their nurturing abilities, leadership potential, and resilience. He argues that understanding a woman requires acknowledging both her biological distinctions and her evolving societal roles influenced by education, empowerment, and globalization. Musa (2021) describes a woman as a change agent and a cornerstone of sustainable development. He asserts that women's contributions in governance, education, and entrepreneurship are critical to national growth. Musa emphasizes that a woman's identity is not limited to domestic responsibilities but includes her capacity to influence policies and drive innovation.

He further notes that the recognition of women's potential is essential for promoting equality and inclusive participation in all sectors of society. Johnson (2022) defines a woman as an individual endowed with emotional intelligence, creativity, and leadership abilities necessary for societal progress. According to him, women possess the inherent strength to manage both family and professional responsibilities effectively. Johnson highlights that modern definitions of womanhood have shifted from dependency and subordination to empowerment and equality, reflecting broader changes in gender relations and human rights awareness across Africa.

Bello (2023) conceptualizes a woman as a builder of human capital and moral values within the community. He maintains that women serve as primary educators and caregivers, shaping the next generation through their influence in homes and society. Bello notes that the empowerment of women through education and political inclusion enhances social development and contributes to poverty reduction. He concludes that societies that invest in women's empowerment experience more sustainable growth and stability. Adekunle (2024) defines a woman as a multidimensional being whose identity embodies strength, compassion, and adaptability. She explains that despite facing discrimination and marginalization, women have continuously proven to be resilient and resourceful contributors to development. Adekunle further argues that redefining the concept of womanhood requires dismantling traditional stereotypes and promoting gender equity in education, leadership, and employment opportunities.

Concept of Participation

According to Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008), participation refers to the act of taking part in decision-making concerning goals and objectives, specifically determining what should be done, how it should be done, and by whom. They emphasize that participatory development is fundamental to achieving sustainable development. In this context, participation encompasses the capacity of individuals, regardless of age, gender, or socioeconomic status, to contribute meaningfully to decision-making processes and to play an active role in enhancing the quality of life within their communities.

Concept of Politics

The concept of politics has been widely debated among scholars, leading to multiple interpretations that reflect differing ideological, social, and moral standpoints. According to Okuchukwu (2023), politics refers to partisan engagement characterized by loyalty to party principles and policies, often pursued regardless of public or personal interest. This perspective suggests that political actions are frequently motivated by allegiance to party ideology rather than by the pursuit of common good. Similarly, Wilson (2014) defines politics as behavior driven by what benefits a political party rather than what serves the broader society. This viewpoint underscores the argument that contemporary politics, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria, is often self-serving and prioritizes party interests over citizens' welfare.

In contrast, Tony (2014) and Huckson (2014) present politics and political parties as organized systems through which individuals pursue collective goals and seek to acquire and exercise power. According to Huckson (2014), political parties function as autonomous groups of citizens who nominate candidates and contest elections to gain control of governmental authority. This definition portrays politics as an institutionalized mechanism for governance and societal organization, suggesting that political participation is essential for democratic functioning and policy formulation. Thus, while some scholars view politics as a tool for social dominance and partisanship, others perceive it as a legitimate means of organizing governance for public good.

Oshewolo (2011) adds another dimension by conceptualizing politics as a practice that requires leadership skills, strategic insight, and astuteness. This interpretation moves beyond partisanship and focuses on the human qualities and competencies required for political leadership. Politics, therefore, is not merely about power struggles but also about the capacity to make informed decisions and manage societal affairs effectively. This broader understanding acknowledges that politics is omnipresent manifesting in various forms such as politics of marginalization, exclusionary politics, and identity politics each reflecting the dynamics of social relations and power distribution.

Marxist theorists, as noted by Murkherjee and Ramaswamy (2007), offer a radical critique by viewing politics as a struggle between antagonistic classes. From this perspective, the state functions as an instrument of oppression controlled by the ruling elite. Natufe (2001) aligns with this view, defining politics as a contest for power and influence, determining “who gets what, when, and why.” This power-centric approach implies that politics inherently involves conflict over the distribution of resources and opportunities. Consequently, marginalized groups such as women engage in what Natufe (2001) terms “resistance politics,” advocating for systemic reforms to eliminate inequality and ensure fairness in political participation.

Conversely, “resistance to change,” according to Natufe (2001), is the reactionary force led by the ruling elite both military and civilian who resist reforms that threaten their dominance. This dialectical tension between resistance politics and resistance to change mirrors the gendered dynamics of Nigerian politics, where women often fight against exclusion and seek representation, while men, entrenched in traditional power structures, oppose reforms that promote equality. Hence, the political landscape becomes a battleground between progressive movements advocating inclusivity and conservative forces intent on maintaining the status quo.

In essence, the argument emerging from these diverse perspectives is that politics, though intended as a vehicle for collective governance and societal development, often becomes a tool of exclusion, domination, and self-interest. The struggle for power and representation within Nigerian politics reflects broader social inequalities, particularly along gender lines. Women, as proponents of resistance politics, continuously challenge the patriarchal norms

that hinder their participation, while men, representing resistance to change, uphold structures that preserve their control. Therefore, any meaningful discourse on political development in Nigeria must confront these entrenched dynamics of power, inclusion, and resistance.

Women Participation in Politics

Olayiwola and Okorie (2020) define women participation in politics as the active involvement of women in political activities, including voting, contesting elections, policy formulation, and holding leadership positions within political institutions. They emphasize that such participation reflects women's empowerment and equality in decision-making processes that affect their lives and communities. According to the authors, when women are adequately represented in politics, it leads to inclusive governance and promotes democratic consolidation. Akinola (2021) views women participation in politics as the extent to which women engage in formal and informal political processes that shape governance and development outcomes. He notes that participation is not limited to elective positions but includes involvement in political parties, advocacy groups, and civic organizations. Akinola further asserts that women's participation enhances accountability and broadens the policy agenda to include social welfare, education, and gender equity issues.

Samaila and Dele (2019) describe women participation in politics as the process by which women exercise their political rights to influence governance structures at local, state, and national levels. They argue that this participation represents a critical indicator of gender equality in society and is essential for sustainable development. The authors highlight that despite global advocacy for gender inclusion, socio-cultural barriers, economic challenges, and patriarchal ideologies still hinder Nigerian women's active political engagement.

Yusuf and Ibrahim (2022) define women participation in politics as the degree of access women have to political opportunities and their ability to influence political outcomes through decision-making roles. They explain that such participation encompasses not only quantitative representation in political offices but also qualitative contributions to governance and policy outcomes. The authors stress that meaningful participation requires an enabling environment where women's voices are respected, and gender bias is minimized. Bappa (2018) conceptualizes women participation in politics as the empowerment of women to take part in governance through voting, candidacy, and policy advocacy. She argues that this participation is both a right and a responsibility, serving as a measure of a nation's democratic maturity. Bappa contends that political systems that exclude women deny themselves the diversity and innovation that women bring into leadership and decision-making processes.

Concept of Women Marginalization

In examining the extent to which marginalization has influenced women's participation in politics in Nigeria, scholars have offered diverse interpretations of the concept. According to

Ojukwu (2005), marginalization represents a state of relative deprivation_a deliberate act of disempowerment carried out by dominant groups that control political authority and the distribution of material and social resources. This definition underscores the structural nature of exclusion, where those in power consciously suppress the political visibility and influence of others, including women. Similarly, Obianyo (2003) conceptualizes marginalization as neglect, noninvolvement, or inequality in the distribution of socio-economic and political resources within the state. His view highlights the institutional and systemic barriers that limit equitable participation in governance.

Building upon this perspective, Akinbade (2004) argues that marginalization entails the denial of access to political power or social benefits to certain groups or regions while extending privileges to others. He further contends that this phenomenon is especially prevalent in Nigeria, where women continue to decry political exclusion and limited access to decision-making structures. Collectively, these interpretations illustrate that women's political marginalization in Nigeria is not accidental but rather a manifestation of entrenched socio-political hierarchies and gender bias that continue to hinder their full participation in governance.

Challenges to Women Participation in Politics

Parties' Discrimination against Women: Political parties in Nigeria continue to exhibit discriminatory practices that hinder women's participation in politics. The use of zoning, godfatherism, imposition of candidates, exorbitant nomination fees, as well as the use of thugs and bribery during party primaries, have all worked against women's political inclusion. These practices disproportionately affect women because they often lack the financial resources and access to male-dominated networks required to navigate such a system. Consequently, women find it difficult to "play the political game" under these conditions. Furthermore, many political parties still do not have women occupying executive positions within their structures, reflecting deep-rooted gender bias in political party administration (Ako-Nai, 2005).

Cultural Restraints: Cultural traditions also serve as a major obstacle to women's political involvement in Nigeria. In some Igbo states of the Niger-Delta region_such as Abia, Imo, and parts of Delta and Rivers States_retrogressive cultural beliefs persist, suggesting that women cannot be leaders because they are forbidden from performing traditional rites such as "breaking kola nuts," a symbol of authority in Igbo society. Prominent women such as Onyeka Onwenu and Loretta Aniagolu (both from Abia State) have faced such discriminatory cultural restrictions in their localities. Similarly, Irabor (2011) noted that despite a growing sense of political reawakening among Nigerian women, many remain constrained by traditional and cultural perceptions that regard them as inferior, weak, and incapable of leadership.

Insecurity: Insecurity is another significant barrier to women's political participation, particularly in volatile areas of Adamawa State plagued by kidnapping, armed violence, and other social vices. The constant threat of abduction, displacement, and physical harm discourages women from engaging in political activities or contesting for elective positions. Many women lack the political will to participate in such hostile environments. A women leader interviewed during the course of this study affirmed this fear, stating: "We women are afraid of being kidnapped for ransom because we don't have the means, and we cannot withstand the terrors of gunshots and the criminal activities of men in the game of politics." Such insecurity thus creates an atmosphere of fear and exclusion, further limiting women's political engagement.

Indigeneity Restraints: The principle of indigeneity, originally included in Nigeria's 1979 Constitution to promote equitable regional representation, has inadvertently become a tool of exclusion for women. Studies by Thomas (2003) reveal that women who marry outside their ethnic or regional origin are often disenfranchised politically. In their natal constituencies, they are told that by marrying "out," they have forfeited their indigeneity; meanwhile, in their husband's constituency, they are regarded as outsiders because indigeneity is defined through bloodline rather than marriage. This dual exclusion effectively bars many married women from active political participation, leaving them politically marginalized in both communities.

High Cost of Politics: The high financial cost associated with political participation in Nigeria poses another major challenge to women's inclusion. The exorbitant prices of party nomination forms, coupled with the heavy expenses involved in organizing political rallies and campaigns, make it extremely difficult for most women to compete effectively with their male counterparts. As a result, many women with political ambitions are discouraged from pursuing elective positions, further widening the gender gap in Nigeria's political landscape.

Prospects of Women participation in Politics

The prospects of women's participation in politics in Nigeria are gradually improving due to growing awareness of gender equality and the increasing advocacy for inclusive governance. Over the past decade, both governmental and non-governmental organizations have intensified campaigns promoting women's political engagement through voter education, leadership training, and mentorship programs. According to Akinola (2020), initiatives such as the National Gender Policy and the 35% affirmative action have created a framework that encourages political parties to increase women's representation in elective and appointive positions. Similarly, international organizations like the United Nations and African Union continue to pressure Nigeria to meet global gender inclusion standards, enhancing opportunities for women's active political participation (Usman, 2022).

Another key prospect lies in the changing socio-political attitudes toward women in leadership. The younger generation, driven by social media and education, is increasingly supportive of female leaders, thereby challenging the traditional patriarchal norms that previously hindered women's involvement in governance. Edeh (2021) observed that educated women, particularly in urban areas, are becoming more politically aware and assertive in seeking leadership positions. Furthermore, the emergence of female political figures such as Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Aisha Yesufu has served as inspiration, demonstrating that competence and integrity transcend gender barriers. This shift indicates a promising pathway for women to participate more meaningfully in Nigeria's political landscape.

Moreover, the rise of technology and digital platforms offers women new avenues to participate in politics, campaign effectively, and mobilize grassroots support. Online activism has become a powerful tool for female politicians to share their visions, raise funds, and challenge discriminatory practices without relying solely on traditional male-dominated political structures. According to Onah (2023), digital media has democratized political engagement by providing equal opportunities for women to project their voices and influence public discourse. With sustained advocacy, supportive legal frameworks, and increased access to education and technology, the future of women's participation in Nigerian politics appears increasingly optimistic.

Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by theories of Gender Oppression- patriarchy and Liberal Feminism Theories. The present state of women's marginalization is due to factors such as socio-cultural practices, marginalization in political party, poor access to education, lack of women empowerment, and lack of political funding and so on (Ama, 1998). In analyzing marginalization of Women in Nigeria Democratic process, patriarchy theory comes to mind. From time immemorial. Nigerian has been a patriarchy society (Ama, 1998). Patriarchy structure has been a major feature of the traditional society. It is a structure of a set of social relations with material base which enables men to dominate women (Stacey 1993; Kramarae 1992; Lerner 1986; Hurnrn 1989; Ama 1998). It is a system of social stratification and differentiation on the basis of sex, which provides material advantages to male while simultaneously placing severe constraints on the roles and activities of female.

Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual qualitative research design, relying exclusively on secondary data to examine the challenges and prospects of women's participation in politics in Adamawa State from 2015 to 2023. The methodology involves a systematic review and content analysis of relevant literature, government documents, political party constitutions, electoral commission reports, media publications, and NGO/CSO reports obtained from

credible databases such as Google Scholar, AJOL, and institutional repositories. Using a thematic and interpretive analytical approach, the study identifies recurring patterns and relationships among factors such as socio-cultural norms, party structures, financial barriers, political violence, and policy interventions that affect women's political engagement. Inclusion criteria focus on sources published between 2010 and 2024 that address women's political participation in Nigeria or Adamawa State, while irrelevant or unverifiable materials are excluded.

Result and Discussion

The paper found the following:

- i. The study found that political parties remain the most formidable obstacle to women's political participation. Practices such as zoning, godfatherism, candidate imposition, and exorbitant nomination fees create institutionalized barriers that favor men over women. This supports Ako-Nai's (2005) assertion that Nigerian political parties exhibit entrenched patriarchal tendencies that marginalize women in both elective and administrative positions. The absence of women in party leadership roles further limits their influence on internal decision-making, reinforcing gender inequality. This finding aligns with the theory of political patriarchy, which posits that men dominate political spaces through structural and cultural control mechanisms that exclude women from power.
- ii. Additionally, cultural traditions were found to be deeply embedded obstacles, especially in regions like the Niger-Delta and parts of Northern Nigeria, where patriarchal norms dictate that leadership is a male prerogative. Practices such as excluding women from traditional rites (e.g., breaking kola nuts) symbolize the broader societal perception of women as unfit for authority. This corroborates Irabor's (2011) observation that traditional beliefs continue to reinforce gender stereotypes, making it socially unacceptable for women to challenge male dominance. Consequently, even educated and politically conscious women face social stigmatization when they attempt to participate in politics.
- iii. The issue of insecurity was also identified as a serious deterrent to women's political involvement, particularly in conflict-prone areas of Adamawa State. The prevalence of kidnapping, political thuggery, and armed violence creates a climate of fear that discourages women from active engagement. The findings confirm the statement of a women leader interviewed, who lamented the risks associated with political participation, especially the threat of abduction and violence. This supports the argument that security and gender are closely linked, as unsafe political environments disproportionately affect women's ability to participate (UN Women, 2021). Hence, improving security is fundamental to enhancing women's political empowerment in Nigeria.
- iv. Another major finding is the discriminatory impact of the indigeneity clause. As noted by Thomas (2003), the principle of indigeneity originally intended to ensure fair representation has become a source of exclusion for women married outside their

place of origin. The study confirmed that such women often lose political rights in both their natal and marital communities, resulting in double marginalization. This legal and cultural paradox discourages cross-regional political participation by women and undermines national integration.

- v. Furthermore, the high cost of politics emerged as a consistent challenge limiting women's competitiveness in elections. Political campaigns and nomination forms are extremely expensive, favoring wealthier male politicians who can afford to "buy" influence. Many women lack financial independence and access to patronage networks, making it nearly impossible to compete on equal footing. This finding resonates with Aina (2018), who argued that economic disempowerment is one of the strongest predictors of female underrepresentation in Nigerian politics.

Conclusion

The study concludes that women's participation in politics in Nigeria, particularly in Adamawa State, remains significantly constrained by entrenched structural, cultural, and economic barriers. Political party discrimination, characterized by zoning, godfatherism, candidate imposition, and excessive nomination fees, has created an exclusionary political environment that favors men and sidelines women. Cultural restraints rooted in patriarchal beliefs further limit women's acceptance as leaders, while insecurity, especially in volatile regions, instills fear and discourages female political engagement. Similarly, the principle of indigeneity and the high financial cost of political participation continue to marginalize women, making political inclusion a difficult endeavor for most.

However, the findings also indicate a gradual yet promising shift in the political landscape. Governmental and non-governmental initiatives promoting gender equality, such as the National Gender Policy and 35% affirmative action, have provided frameworks for inclusion. Moreover, changing societal attitudes, inspired by successful female role models and amplified through digital technology, are beginning to challenge long-standing patriarchal norms. The rise of social media activism has particularly empowered women to engage politically, mobilize support, and advocate for reform outside traditional power structures.

Therefore, the study concludes that while the challenges to women's political participation in Nigeria are profound, they are not insurmountable. A combination of legal reforms, gender-sensitive political party structures, improved security, financial empowerment, and continued advocacy for equality can create a more enabling environment for women's full participation in politics. If sustained, these efforts will not only enhance women's representation in governance but also strengthen Nigeria's democracy through inclusivity, equity, and balanced decision-making.

Recommendations

The study recommends the followings:

1. Women should be constitutionally provided the means to assist in contributing to policies, issues, and programmes that will politically assist in governance and decision making in Nigeria through adequate representation.
2. Women can foster unity and cohesion among the diverse groups in Nigeria if they are adequately represented and are part of the decision making process in the local government.
3. Women should be given the opportunity to initiate, mould and execute public policy and legislation in Nigeria.
4. Women should be encourage to participate and contest election in Nigeria in order to introduce and help implement policies and programmes that will assist in empowering women in the local government.
5. Women participation in politics should be encouraged through sensitization and enlightenment in order to make the society conducive for harmonious co-existence.
6. Women candidates of the various political parties should be provided the fund for electioneering by the local government and the various political parties.
7. Cultural and religious discrimination should be discouraged in order to encourage women participation in politics.
8. Low level of women education can be solved through adequate policies and programmes that will promote women education in the local government.

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