

An Assessment of Cultural and Socioeconomic Barriers to Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

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Abstract

Political participation is a fundamental pillar of democratic governance, allowing citizens to influence decision-making processes and ensuring inclusive and equitable representation. Despite global and national efforts to promote gender inclusivity, women in Nigeria remain significantly underrepresented in political leadership and decision-making roles. This study examines the cultural and socioeconomic barriers that hinder women's political participation in Nigeria, focusing on traditional norms, economic inequalities, and systemic structures that marginalise women. By synthesising existing literature and theoretical perspectives, the research develops a conceptual framework highlighting four critical dimensions: cultural determinants, economic conditions, systemic structures, and intersectional influences. The findings reveal that patriarchal norms, restrictive cultural attitudes, religious doctrines, and socioeconomic disparities collectively limit women's political engagement. The study also evaluates strategies to address these barriers, including legislative reforms, awareness campaigns, economic empowerment initiatives, and cultural reorientation. These recommendations aim to promote gender equity, enhance women's representation in governance, and advance democratic ideals. This research contributes to the discourse on gender equity and political representation, offering actionable insights to inform policy interventions and grassroots initiatives for fostering inclusive governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Women's Political Participation, Cultural Barriers, Socioeconomic Inequalities, Gender Equity, Inclusive Governance.*

1. Introduction

Political participation stands as a cornerstone of democratic governance, ensuring citizens' voices influence decision-making processes and fostering inclusive, accountable, and equitable representation. A key measure of democratic maturity is the active involvement of diverse demographic groups, including women, in politics. Yet, despite notable advancements in global and national efforts to promote gender inclusivity, women remain disproportionately underrepresented in political leadership and decision-making roles. Persistent barriers, both structural and systemic, continue to hinder their political engagement.

In Nigeria, this gender gap is particularly pronounced. Although women constitute nearly half of the nation's population, their representation in political roles remains remarkably low. As of 2023, women hold less than 10% of seats in Nigeria's national parliament, placing the country among the lowest globally for female political representation (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023). This persistent underrepresentation highlights the interplay of entrenched cultural norms and socioeconomic inequalities that collectively marginalise women in the political sphere.

Cultural factors, deeply rooted in patriarchy and traditional gender roles, remain significant impediments to women's political participation. Patriarchal ideologies and practices, such as early marriage, polygamy, and societal expectations of domesticity, position women in subordinate roles within both the family and the community, limiting their agency. These cultural norms are further reinforced by religious beliefs that often intersect with traditional practices, exacerbating the challenges women face in pursuing political ambitions (Adedokun, 2021).

Compounding these cultural barriers are socioeconomic inequalities, including poverty and limited access to education and resources. Women in Nigeria disproportionately experience poverty, which undermines their ability to fund political campaigns or participate in electoral processes. Furthermore, gender disparities in educational attainment leave many women without the skills, confidence, or social capital necessary to navigate the political landscape effectively (UNESCO, 2022; World Bank, 2023). The financial demands of Nigeria's political culture further exclude economically disadvantaged women, reinforcing the systemic barriers that inhibit their participation (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2021).

While existing research has made strides in exploring cultural and socioeconomic factors as independent barriers, limited attention has been paid to their intersection. This research gap obscures the nuanced ways in which these dimensions interact to perpetuate gender inequality in politics. By addressing this gap, the present study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges Nigerian women face in accessing political roles.

The primary objective of this study is to examine how cultural and socioeconomic barriers jointly impede women's political participation in Nigeria. Specifically, it aims to explore the influence of traditional norms and practices on women's access to political roles, analyse the impact of socioeconomic inequalities on political opportunities, and propose actionable strategies for overcoming these barriers through a conceptual framework that captures the strategies for women's Political Participation in Nigeria was developed. Through this exploration, the research seeks to establish how cultural and socioeconomic constitute an impediment to women participation in politics in order to contribute to ongoing efforts to promote gender equity in Nigerian politics, as well as to offer an insight that can inform policy interventions and grassroots initiatives aimed at fostering inclusive governance. By investigating the structural and systemic challenges faced by women in Nigerian politics, this study adds to the broader discourse on gender equity and political representation. In doing so, it provides a framework for addressing the root causes of women's underrepresentation, with the ultimate goal of advancing democratic ideals and achieving sustainable development through inclusive governance.

2. Conceptual Review

a. Cultural barriers

Women's political participation is integral to achieving inclusive governance and equitable decision-making processes. However, across the globe, women face significant challenges in engaging with and succeeding in the political sphere. In Nigeria, these barriers are deeply rooted in cultural and socioeconomic structures, which perpetuate gender disparities and hinder progress towards gender parity in political representation. This review examines the cultural and socioeconomic barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria, offering insights into the multifaceted challenges that shape women's political experiences.

Patriarchy is a dominant cultural structure in Nigeria, shaping societal perceptions of gender roles. Women are often relegated to domestic and reproductive roles, with leadership and decision-making viewed as the exclusive domain of men. This patriarchal framework limits women's agency and discourages them from pursuing political ambitions (Adedayo, 2020). Gender roles are further reinforced by traditional practices such as early marriage and polygamy, which constrain women's opportunities for education, career advancement, and political engagement (Adedokun, 2021).

Religious beliefs and practices significantly influence gender dynamics in Nigerian politics. In many instances, religious teachings are interpreted in ways that reinforce patriarchal norms, restricting women's leadership opportunities. For example, interpretations of Islamic and Christian doctrines often emphasise women's roles within the home rather than in public life, thereby discouraging political involvement (Usman, 2021). These religious influences intersect with cultural norms to create a restrictive environment for women's political participation.

Women who challenge traditional norms by entering politics frequently face social stigma and discrimination. Politically active women are often labelled as being unfeminine or morally compromised, deterring many from pursuing political careers. Such stigmatisation is further compounded by media portrayals that trivialise women's political contributions or focus disproportionately on their personal lives rather than their competencies (Okafor & Duru, 2022).

b. Socioeconomic barriers

Economic inequalities and educational disparities further exacerbate the challenges faced by Nigerian women in politics.

Poverty is a pervasive issue in Nigeria, disproportionately affecting women. Economic hardship restricts women's ability to fund political campaigns or participate in financially demanding political activities. The cost of running for office in Nigeria is prohibitively high, creating significant barriers for women who lack the necessary financial resources (Akinola, 2018). This economic disparity leaves many women unable to compete effectively in the political arena.

Education plays a pivotal role in empowering individuals to participate in governance. However, Nigerian women often face significant educational disadvantages, particularly in rural areas where traditional norms and economic constraints limit girls' access to schooling. These disparities contribute to low levels of political literacy among women, leaving many without the skills or confidence to engage with the political system (UNESCO, 2022).

Economic dependence on male family members further restricts women's political aspirations. Women who rely on their spouses or relatives for financial support often face resistance when attempting to engage in politics, as their participation may be perceived as a challenge to male authority. This dependence undermines women's ability to assert themselves in political spaces and reinforces their exclusion from decision-making roles (World Bank, 2023).

c. Political participation

Political participation encompasses a wide range of activities, from voting and advocacy to contesting elections and holding public office. While voting remains the most common form of participation for Nigerian women, their involvement in higher levels of political leadership remains limited (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023). Efforts to measure political participation often focus on the proportion of women in legislative bodies, an area where Nigeria consistently ranks among the lowest globally.

Globally, women's representation in politics has improved in recent decades, with countries like Rwanda achieving near gender parity in parliament. However, Nigeria significantly lags behind, with women occupying less than 10% of seats in the national parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023). Regionally, Nigeria's performance is also poor compared to other African nations, many of which have implemented affirmative action policies to boost women's representation (Okeke-Ihejirika & Franceschet, 2022).

The barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria are deeply embedded in cultural and socioeconomic structures. Patriarchal norms, religious influences, and social stigma intersect with economic and educational disadvantages to create formidable obstacles for women aspiring to political leadership. Addressing these challenges requires a multidimensional approach that includes policy interventions, public awareness campaigns, and efforts to enhance women's economic and educational opportunities. By dismantling these barriers, Nigeria can move closer to achieving gender parity in politics and fostering inclusive governance.

Types of Political Participation

Political participation encompasses actions aimed at influencing the allocation of societal resources and values (Willeck, & Mendelberg, 2022). Individuals engage in this process by voting for representatives who craft policies affecting taxes, social programmes, and other public matters. They may also participate in organisations that seek to influence policy decisions directly or communicate their interests, preferences, and needs through public discourse (Le & Nguyen, 2021). Such activities may support or challenge governmental institutions, officials, and policies. Although voting remains the most common form of political engagement, numerous other avenues exist, each requiring different levels of time, skill, and resources.

- a) **Voting in Elections:** Voting is the cornerstone of political participation, enabling eligible citizens to elect representatives at local, regional, and national levels (Kersting, 2021). Beyond selecting candidates, voters often make decisions on referendums involving issues such as budgetary priorities, constitutional amendments, and policy changes. This process provides a mechanism for citizens to shape governance and hold leaders accountable (Norris, 2022).
- b) **Communicating with Representatives:** Engaging with elected representatives through letters, emails, phone calls, or personal meetings allows constituents to express concerns, seek clarifications, and offer policy suggestions. This form of interaction strengthens the connection between voters and decision-makers, ensuring that public officials remain responsive to societal needs (Henderson et al., 2023; Pitkin, 2021).
- c) **Participating in Public Demonstrations and Protests:** Public demonstrations and protests offer citizens a platform to voice discontent and demand action on pressing issues. Peaceful protests, including marches and sit-ins, play a pivotal role in raising awareness and influencing policy. Movements like #EndSARS in Nigeria and Black Lives Matter globally exemplify the transformative power of collective action (Head, 2024; Tufekci, 2022).
- d) **Joining Civil Society Organisations (CSOs):** Active participation in CSOs, such as advocacy groups, unions, and non-governmental organisations empowers individuals to address societal challenges. These organisations champion causes ranging from human rights to environmental conservation, providing platforms for meaningful engagement (Smith & Adams, 2023).

- e) **Attending Political Rallies and Town Hall Meetings:** Political rallies and town hall meetings create opportunities for direct engagement with leaders, candidates, and other constituents. These events encourage dialogue, promote transparency, and allow citizens to express their views on key issues (Manning, 2020).
- f) **Membership in Political Parties:** Becoming a member of a political party is a vital form of participation that involves attending meetings, voting in primaries, organising events, and fundraising. This level of involvement enables individuals to influence party policies and contribute to national discourse (Barber, 2021; Rosenblum, 2021).
- g) **Volunteering for Campaigns:** Volunteering in election campaigns allows citizens to actively support candidates or causes through canvassing, phone banking, and distributing materials. This grassroots participation fosters political awareness and strengthens community ties (Karpf, 2022).
- h) **Social Media Advocacy:** The advent of digital platforms has revolutionised political participation, enabling citizens to share information, mobilise support, and raise awareness through social media. Hashtags, online petitions, and digital campaigns have proven especially effective in engaging younger demographics and amplifying grassroots causes (Adeyinka & Ijaiya, 2024; Chadwick, 2021).
- i) **Running for Public Office:** Running for public office represents one of the most direct ways to engage in politics. While it requires significant commitment, it enables individuals to shape policy and governance directly. The increasing participation of women in leadership roles, such as Samia Suluhu Hassan's presidency in Tanzania, highlights progress towards inclusivity in political representation (Ndlovu & Sithole, 2023).

3. Trend of Political Participation in Nigeria

Political participation in Nigeria has evolved significantly over the decades, shaped by the country's colonial history, transitions between military and civilian rule, and the socio-economic and technological changes of the modern era. This participation includes voting, civil activism, protests, engagement in political party activities, and leveraging digital platforms for advocacy.

- a) **Low Voter Turnout in Elections:** Despite periodic general elections, voter turnout in Nigeria has shown a declining trend, especially in recent years (Hassan, 2024). According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), turnout in the 2019 presidential election was approximately 35%, one of the lowest in the country's democratic history. This decline is attributed to voter apathy, mistrust in the electoral process, insecurity, and logistical challenges during elections (Mohammed, Enganya, & Adi, 2024).
- b) **Youth Activism and Engagement:** The youth population in Nigeria has increasingly turned to activism and digital platforms as means of political participation. Movements such as #EndSARS in 2020 illustrated the power of young Nigerians to mobilise on social media, highlighting police brutality and broader issues of governance and accountability. This trend reflects a shift towards non-traditional forms of participation, driven by dissatisfaction with conventional political structures (Kehinde et al., 2023).

- c) **Role of Social Media:** Digital platforms have become central to political participation in Nigeria, with citizens using tools like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp to debate policies, mobilise for protests, and campaign for candidates. The rise of hashtags such as #NotTooYoungToRun exemplifies how social media has fostered awareness and advocacy for inclusivity in governance (Imoka, 2023).
- d) **Increased Women's Participation:** Although women remain underrepresented in Nigerian politics, recent years have seen efforts to enhance their participation (Ette, & Akpan-Obong, 2023). Initiatives like the "50-50 Action Women" project have worked to increase female representation in political offices. However, cultural, religious, and systemic barriers continue to limit women's involvement (Alokwu, Oranika-Umeasiegbu, & Udegbumam, 2024).
- e) Political participation in Nigeria reflects a blend of traditional and modern dynamics, with growing youth activism, digital engagement, and diaspora contributions shaping the landscape. However, addressing systemic barriers and fostering inclusivity are crucial for ensuring a robust democratic process that reflects the diversity and aspirations of Nigerian society.

4. Theoretical Framework: Feminist Theory

This research on assessing cultural and socioeconomic barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria is grounded in Feminist Theory, specifically the intersectional feminist framework. It examines the complex interplay of cultural, socioeconomic, and political factors that hinder women's active involvement in Nigerian politics.

Feminist Theory, rooted in the work of scholars such as Simone de Beauvoir (1949), Judith Butler (1990), and bell hooks (1984), provides a lens to interrogate the power structures and systemic inequalities that reinforce gender disparities (Okpokwasili, 2024). Intersectional feminism, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), focuses on how overlapping social identities such as gender, ethnicity, class, and religion create unique forms of discrimination and privilege.

In the Nigerian context, women's political participation is often shaped by entrenched cultural norms, patriarchal structures, and socioeconomic limitations (Ilodigwe, & Uzoh, 2024). Feminist Theory helps elucidate how these barriers operate in tandem, limiting women's access to leadership roles and decision-making processes.

Application to the Research

- a) **Cultural Barriers:** Feminist Theory highlights the role of traditional norms and gender stereotypes in perpetuating discrimination against women (Stewart, Wright, Smith, Roberts, & Russell, 2021). In Nigeria, cultural expectations around domestic roles, early marriage, and obedience to male authority restrict women's capacity to pursue political ambitions (Mensah, 2023). These norms are often reinforced by religious and ethnic traditions, which marginalize women in public life.

- b) **Socioeconomic Barriers:** Intersectional feminism examines how economic disparities intersect with gender to exclude women from political participation (Yildirim, 2022). High costs of political campaigns, financial dependence on male relatives, and limited access to education and resources disproportionately affect Nigerian women, making it difficult for them to contest elections or hold political office (Nazneen, 2023).
- c) **Institutional and Structural Barriers:** Feminist Theory further critiques the male-dominated political structures that limit women's representation (Sapkota, & Dahal, 2022). Electoral violence, vote-buying, and a lack of supportive party mechanisms are institutional obstacles that discourage women's involvement in politics (Essien, & Oghuvbu, 2021).

By employing Feminist Theory and its intersectional framework, this study aims to uncover the layered and interconnected barriers that Nigerian women face in political participation. This theoretical grounding not only provides a comprehensive understanding of the issue but also informs strategies to dismantle systemic inequalities and promote gender equity in political representation

5. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, analytical approach to examine the cultural and socioeconomic barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria. By synthesizing existing literature, the research seeks to develop a conceptual framework that captures the strategies for women's Political Participation in Nigeria. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the structural and systemic factors that perpetuate gender inequality in Nigerian politics.

Data Sources: The research draws on a wide range of secondary data sources to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the topic. Scholarly articles from peer-reviewed journal articles provide critical insights into existing research on cultural and socioeconomic barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria.

Data Analysis: The data collected from secondary sources are thematically coded and categorised based on recurring patterns and key themes. This method facilitates the identification of the most significant cultural and socioeconomic barriers to women's political participation.

This methodology ensures a robust and holistic understanding of the barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria, providing a foundation for actionable recommendations aimed at promoting gender equity and inclusive governance.

6. Findings

This is a qualitative content analysis exploring cultural and socioeconomic barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria. The study synthesises the existing literature and theoretical perspectives by identifying major themes and sub-themes.

Themes 1: Influence of traditional norms and practices on women's access to political roles

Cultural Barriers

Patriarchal Norms: Widespread patriarchal values restrict women's political agency by prioritising male leadership roles. Studies highlight how entrenched gender roles perpetuate these dynamics (Kelly, 2019; Orji et al., 2018). Cultural attitudes tie women's identities primarily to domestic responsibilities, limiting their political engagement opportunities (Pyeatt & Yanus, 2017).

Religious Practices: Religious doctrines, particularly in Muslim-dominated regions, often limit women's visibility in public and political spheres (Bhalotra et al., 2013; Isaksson et al., 2014). However, Christian-affiliated women demonstrate comparatively higher levels of political participation (Dim & Asomah, 2019).

Societal Expectations: Cultural perceptions confine women to ceremonial roles in political parties, marginalising them from decision-making processes (Orji et al., 2018).

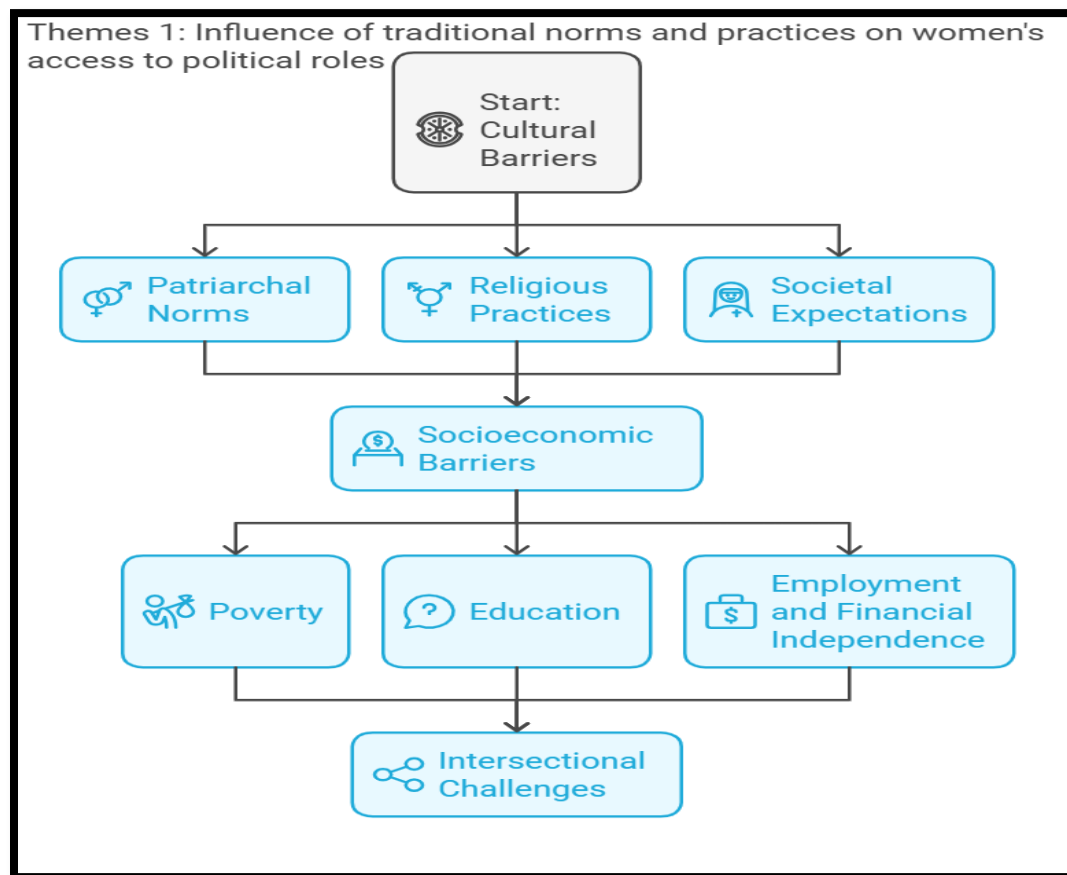


Figure 1. Graphical representation of theme one major findings: Influence of traditional norms and practices on women's access to political roles.

Socioeconomic Barriers

Poverty: High poverty rates in northern Nigeria (72%) compared to the south (27%) exacerbate gender disparities in political representation (Herbert & Husaini, 2018).

Education: While education is positively correlated with women's political participation globally, the relationship is complex in Nigeria. Low education levels in northern regions (13.7%) contrast starkly with higher levels in the south (37.4%) (National Population Commission and ICF, 2019).

Women with lower education levels often face systemic barriers, despite regional examples like Rwanda where political representation is higher among undereducated women (Goetz, 2003).

Employment and Financial Independence: Access to employment and control over income are critical but not sufficient to ensure increased political participation, especially in patriarchal contexts where financial independence alone does not dismantle gender barriers (Isaksson et al., 2014).

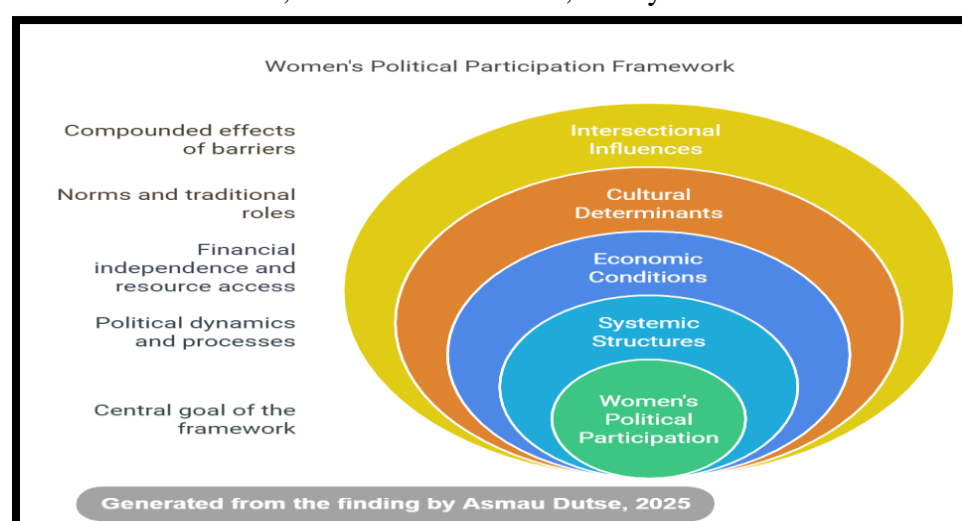
Intersectional Challenges

The intersection of cultural and socioeconomic barriers often magnifies challenges. For instance: Women in northern Nigeria face compounding disadvantages of poverty, limited education, and restrictive cultural norms (Dim & Asomah, 2019).

Religious norms further inhibit women's access to education and employment, creating a cyclical barrier to political participation.

Theme 2: Impact of socioeconomic inequalities on political opportunities for women

The low level of women's political participation in Nigeria stems from a complex interplay of cultural, socioeconomic, and systemic barriers, each of which exerts a significant influence on their ability to engage meaningfully in political processes. By synthesising existing literature and theoretical perspectives, the proposed conceptual framework outlines four critical dimensions that underpin the structural and systemic factors perpetuating gender inequality in Nigerian politics. These dimensions as shown in Figure 2 and explained in the subsequent session are cultural determinants, economic conditions, and systemic structure.



Intersectional influences, offer a holistic lens to understand the challenges faced by women in attaining political representation.

Figure 2. Graphical representation of theme two major findings: Impact of socioeconomic inequalities on political opportunities for women

Cultural Determinants

Cultural norms play a pervasive role in shaping women's political participation in Nigeria, as patriarchal ideologies, religious doctrines, and societal expectations collectively limit women's access to leadership roles. Traditional roles often confine women to the domestic sphere, reinforcing the perception that politics is a male domain. This cultural framework is particularly evident in regions where religious practices, such as Sharia law in Northern Nigeria, further restrict women's public engagement. Scholars such as Orji et al. (2018) argue that political parties in Nigeria embed patriarchal values within their structures, relegating women to ceremonial and supportive roles rather than positions of power. While some Christian affiliations are associated with slightly higher levels of women's political engagement (Dim & Asomah, 2019), the overarching patriarchal culture continues to privilege men in leadership positions.

Economic Conditions

Economic inequality exacerbates women's exclusion from Nigerian politics, as financial independence is a critical enabler of political participation. Resource access, employment, and education levels significantly impact women's ability to engage politically. Studies highlight that region with higher levels of poverty, such as Northern Nigeria, show starkly lower female political engagement compared to relatively affluent Southern states (Herbert & Husaini, 2018). Education, in particular, emerges as both a barrier and an enabler. Dim and Asomah (2019) emphasise that low educational attainment among women in Northern Nigeria (13.7% with secondary education or above) undermines their participation in public life. Conversely, economic viability, as evidenced in states like Lagos, shows a correlation between financial independence and greater political activity. However, as noted in comparative studies, the relationship between economic factors and political participation is not linear, as other structural barriers continue to mediate these outcomes (Goetz, 2003).

Systemic Structures

Structural systems such as electoral processes, political party dynamics, and the implementation of gender quotas create systemic barriers that reinforce gender inequality in Nigerian politics. The male-dominated nature of political parties marginalises women through exclusionary candidate recruitment processes and a lack of internal support for female candidates (Orji et al., 2018). While some countries have successfully increased female representation through quota systems, Nigeria has yet to adopt widespread measures that guarantee women's inclusion in governance. Goetz (2003) highlights that in countries with majority-plurality systems, such as Nigeria, the political environment often favours elite men, further disadvantaging women.

Additionally, the lack of institutional frameworks to protect female candidates from electoral violence further discourages women from active participation (Kelly, 2019).

Intersectional Influences

The compounded effects of intersecting barriers present a particularly insidious challenge for Nigerian women. Cultural and economic disadvantages often overlap, exacerbating the marginalisation of women in politics. For instance, women in Northern Nigeria face the dual burden of patriarchal norms and economic deprivation, significantly reducing their political visibility. Intersectionality also highlights the influence of education and employment in shaping women's capacity to overcome structural barriers. However, studies suggest that even when women attain formal education or financial independence, cultural norms often neutralise these gains, restricting their participation in public life (Orji et al., 2018).

This conceptual framework underscores the multifaceted barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria. Cultural norms, economic conditions, systemic structures, and intersectional influences interact in ways that reinforce gender inequality and limit women's representation in governance. Addressing these barriers requires a multi-pronged approach, including the adoption of gender quotas, investment in female education, and cultural reorientation campaigns to challenge patriarchal norms. A holistic framework that considers these dimensions provides a comprehensive roadmap for fostering greater political inclusion for Nigerian women.

Theme 3: Conceptual Framework for Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

Women's underrepresentation in Nigerian politics stems from entrenched cultural norms, socioeconomic constraints, and systemic barriers. Addressing these challenges necessitates pragmatic strategies aimed at fostering inclusivity and gender equity. This section evaluates key strategies for overcoming these barriers.

The Role of Political Parties

Political parties are pivotal to enhancing women's political participation. Mlango and Kapingura (2019) highlight the importance of engaging political parties to include women on their candidate lists and to facilitate their involvement within party structures during election periods. However, Liu (2019) argues that achieving this requires recognising and addressing the unequal power structures within electoral institutions, political parties, and society at large. Gender stereotypes and the marginalisation of female politicians often stem from deeply ingrained societal power imbalances that influence perceptions of women's capabilities. By fostering equitable power distributions within party dynamics, political parties can become effective vehicles for gender parity in politics.

Provision of Funds to Female Politicians and Parties

A critical strategy for bridging gender gaps in political representation involves financial support for female politicians and parties with significant female representation. Wright (2019) notes the global momentum for incentivising party reforms to encourage the nomination and election of women. For instance, in Georgia, political parties receive additional funding for achieving

gender quotas in their candidate lists (IDEA, 2018). Similar models could be adapted in Nigeria, where financial constraints often exclude women from competitive political processes. Incentivised funding could not only amplify women’s representation but also promote a culture of gender inclusivity within political institutions.

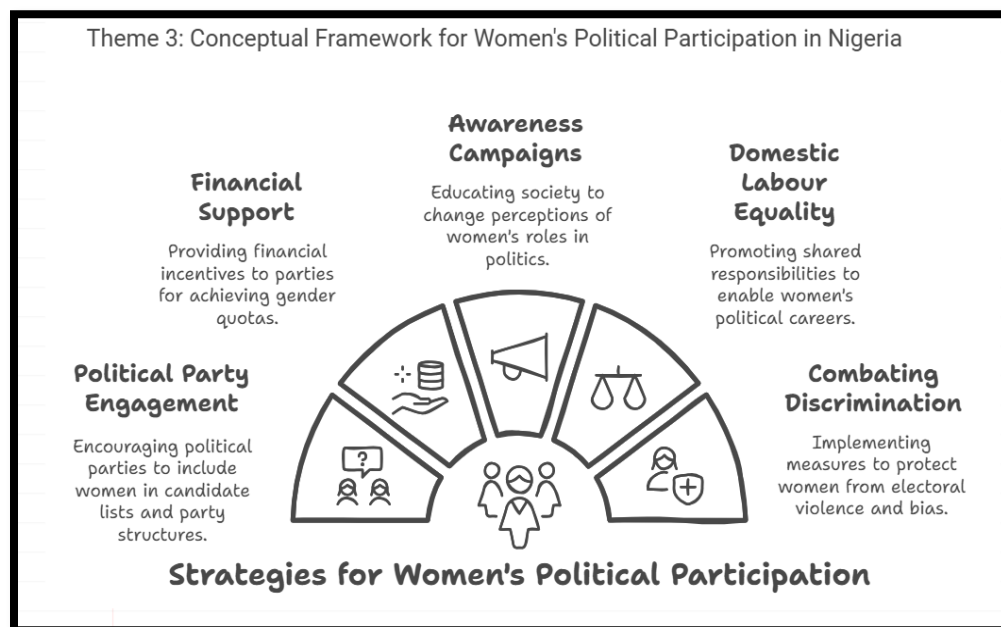


Figure 3. Graphical representation of the major findings in theme three: Conceptual Framework for Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

Awareness Creation

Transforming societal attitudes through awareness campaigns is indispensable for dismantling the perception that politics is exclusively a male domain. Educating women on their rights and roles in political processes is essential. Fox and Lawless (2010) demonstrate that young women are equally likely as men to consider public office when encouraged. This finding underscores the importance of mentorship programmes, leadership training, and campaigns aimed at redefining gender norms and empowering women to envision themselves as equal political actors. Public education initiatives should also target community leaders and media platforms to challenge stereotypes and promote gender-sensitive narratives.

Equal Contribution to Domestic Labour

Family responsibilities disproportionately hinder women’s political participation. Research by Fox and Lawless (2010) reveals that women with familial obligations are significantly less likely to pursue political careers. Addressing this imbalance requires promoting shared domestic responsibilities between men and women. Policies supporting childcare, paid family leave, and flexible working conditions are critical enablers for women balancing family and political careers. Legislative measures mandating family-friendly political environments, such as allowing breastfeeding or providing on-site childcare facilities, could further mitigate the barriers faced by female politicians.

Changing Perceptions and Combating Discrimination

The perception of women as incapable political actors remains a formidable obstacle. Societal change initiatives should focus on dismantling sexism and discrimination through education, policy reform, and advocacy. Preventing violence and harassment against women during elections is also paramount. As Bjarnegård and Zetterberg (2021) assert, electoral violence against women not only discourages their participation but also perpetuates the exclusionary nature of politics. Strengthening legal frameworks to protect women from violence, alongside building their skills and confidence through training programmes, could catalyse a shift toward gender-equitable political systems.

Overcoming the cultural and socioeconomic barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria requires a multidimensional approach encompassing reforms in political parties, financial incentives, awareness campaigns, equitable domestic labour policies, and efforts to combat discrimination. Implementing these strategies will not only elevate women's representation but also contribute to broader societal development by fostering inclusive governance.

7. Discussion of Major Findings

This study sheds light on the intricate cultural and socioeconomic barriers that restrict women's political participation in Nigeria. Through a qualitative content analysis, the research identifies critical themes and sub-themes that illustrate the persistent challenges and systemic inequalities faced by Nigerian women in politics.

Themes 1: Influence of traditional norms and practices on women's access to political roles

The findings highlight how traditional norms and practices significantly hinder women's access to political roles in Nigeria. Patriarchal values, deeply rooted in societal and cultural frameworks, prioritise male leadership and confine women to domestic responsibilities, limiting their political agency. Religious doctrines, particularly in Muslim-majority regions, exacerbate these restrictions, though Christian women exhibit slightly higher political engagement. Societal expectations further marginalise women by relegating them to ceremonial roles within political parties. Additionally, the intersection of cultural and socioeconomic barriers amplifies these challenges, with poverty and limited education creating a cyclical disadvantage that restricts women's political participation.

Theme 2: Impact of socioeconomic inequalities on political opportunities for women

The findings reveal those socioeconomic inequalities significantly hinder women's political participation in Nigeria. Cultural norms, such as patriarchal ideologies and religious practices, limit women's access to leadership roles and confine them to domestic spheres. Economic disparities, including poverty and low educational attainment, further exacerbate these challenges, particularly in Northern Nigeria. Systemic structures, such as male-dominated political parties and the absence of gender quotas, reinforce gender inequality, while intersectional barriers magnify the disadvantages faced by women. Addressing these issues

requires comprehensive strategies, including gender-sensitive reforms, educational investments, and cultural reorientation campaigns to promote inclusivity in governance.

Theme 3: Conceptual Framework for Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

The findings highlight a conceptual framework for addressing women's underrepresentation in Nigerian politics through pragmatic and multidimensional strategies. Key measures include fostering gender equity within political parties, providing financial incentives for female politicians, and raising awareness to challenge cultural stereotypes. Promoting shared domestic responsibilities and combating discrimination through education, advocacy, and stronger legal protections are also essential. These interventions aim to dismantle entrenched barriers, elevate women's political representation, and advance inclusive governance for broader societal progress.

8. Recommendations

Policy Initiatives: Advocate for legislative reforms that mandate gender quotas and ensure equitable representation in political structures.

Educational Programmes: Prioritise women's political literacy and leadership training to enhance their active participation.

Economic Empowerment: Develop strategies to improve women's access to resources, financial independence, and economic opportunities.

Cultural Reorientation: Launch campaigns to challenge traditional norms, dismantle stereotypes, and promote gender equality in society.

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