ASSESSMENT OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN KADUNA NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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Abstract

This study investigates the factors influencing women's participation in the electoral process in Kaduna North Local Government, Nigeria. Utilising secondary data and the theoretical frameworks of liberal democracy and liberal feminism, the research explores the extent of women's engagement and the obstacles they confront. Findings reveal that women are increasingly active voters, but their representation in elective positions remains limited. Significant barriers, such as sociocultural norms, economic constraints, and limited political opportunities, hinder their progress. To enhance women's participation, the study recommends establishing platforms for leadership training, fostering inclusivity, educating women, creating supportive environments within political parties, implementing gender quotas, and strengthening enforcement mechanisms. By addressing these challenges, Kaduna North Local Government can cultivate a more equitable and inclusive political landscape.

Keywords: *Election, Political Participation, Patriarchy, Gender Inequality.*

Introduction

Women's participation in the electoral process is a critical component of democracy, reflecting the level of inclusivity and equality in political governance. Women's political participation in Nigeria remains notably low since the country's return to democracy in 1999. Despite international and national advocacy for women's rights, Nigeria's progress in implementing gender equality instruments has been limited. While the country has ratified the Optional Protocol to CEDAW and signed regional instruments, the underrepresentation of women in government remains a significant challenge. (Ogunbumi, 2023). The 1995 Beijing Declaration's 30% quota for women in government positions has not been fully realised due to entrenched gender biases and societal norms.

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Historical and socio-cultural barriers, patriarchal structures, and institutional challenges have continued to undermine the political involvement of women, particularly at local government levels. Kaduna North Local Government serves as an important case for assessing the dynamics of women's engagement in elections, given its socio-political landscape and demographic diversity.

Electoral participation involves not only voting but also candidacy, activism, and involvement in electoral campaigns. This study focuses on examining how women in Kaduna North engage with the electoral process, identifying the factors that either facilitate or hinder their participation. The analysis will rely on secondary data to understand women's lived experiences and perceptions of the electoral system in this region. Across all national and subnational categories, women represented just over 10 per cent of more than 15,000 candidates who ran in the 2023 elections for president, the National Assembly, governorships, and state assemblies. Despite concerted efforts at the global and national levels to enhance women's political participation, women in Kaduna North Local Government continue to be marginalised in the electoral process. While Kaduna State demonstrated progress in the 2023 general elections with the highest number of female candidates in its geopolitical zone, with 29 female candidates, the representation of women in elected positions remains notably low (CDD 2023). The state's sole female Deputy Governor Dr, Hadiza Sabuwa Balarabe, and the two women elected to the House of Assembly, Comfort Anwe and Munira Suleiman Tanimu, represent Sanga and Lere Constituencies underscores this disparity (Dataphyte Report, 2023). Additionally, women's representation in appointive roles is significantly less than that of their male counterparts. Existing research in Nigeria has predominantly focused on women's participation at the national level, neglecting the critical importance of local government areas where grassroots engagement is paramount. This research gap presents a significant opportunity to delve into the specific challenges and opportunities women face in achieving elective positions within Kaduna North Local Government. It is on this premise that this study aims to assess the level of women's participation in the electoral process in Kaduna North Local Government, focusing on the factors that affect their engagement and the barriers they face. The study also seeks to explore possible interventions that could enhance women's political participation at the local government level. As such, the study seeks to achieve the objective of assessing the extent to which women are involved in the electoral process in Kaduna North Local Government. Also, the barriers that hinder women's full participation in the electoral process in Kaduna North Local government, including political violence, patriarchal norms, and limited access to resources, will be examined.

Conceptual Clarification

Election

The concept of **election** has been explored and defined by various scholars, each offering unique perspectives based on their study of democracy, representation, and political systems. Schumpeter (1942) conceptualises elections as a competitive process in which individuals gain power by winning the electorate's votes. He argues that democracy is essentially a method for selecting

leaders, emphasising the "competitive struggle for people's votes" rather than broader ideals of public will or social justice. Towing further, Robert Dahl (1971) broadens the conceptualisation of elections beyond the mere act of voting. He emphasises the importance of regular, free, and fair elections as part of a system of polyarchy, which includes broad political participation, inclusiveness, and civil liberties. Diamond (cited in Onuegbu, 2023) tries to leave a common definition when he states that an election is a process, vehicle, platform, or institution through which qualified citizens of a country or nation as a people freely choose who governs them and when. The emphasis here is that it provides a mechanism for citizens to delegate authority to leaders while also retaining the right to revoke that authority if necessary, ensuring that the government remains responsive to the needs of the people. An election is a formal process by which eligible members of society, typically citizens in a democracy, cast votes to elect representatives and leaders or decide on policies in a manner that is free, fair, and inclusive. Modern elections increasingly integrate digital technologies for transparency and efficiency, including electronic voting, biometric registration, and real-time result dissemination, while prioritising accountability, equal representation, and the peaceful transfer of power. Elections also serve as a fundamental tool for ensuring government legitimacy and responsiveness to the electorate's needs.

Electoral process

Scholars have approached the electoral process from various perspectives, focusing on its role in democracy, the importance of fairness, and how it reflects or affects the quality of governance. Huntington (1991) sees the electoral process as critical for stabilising democratic transitions. He argues that free and fair elections are essential to institutionalising democracy and ensuring the peaceful transfer of power. The electoral process, when conducted transparently, provides legitimacy to democratic governments. Norris (2014) examines the importance of the integrity of the electoral process. She argues that the integrity of the entire electoral process—from voter registration to the announcement of results—determines the level of trust citizens have in elections and the legitimacy of the political system. She highlights issues like electoral fraud, voter suppression, and irregularities that can undermine democratic outcomes. According to Elekwa (2008), the electoral process involves the entire cycle, ranging from the provision of voter education to the final voting of all aspirants. In another dimension, Ogbeide (2013) defines the electoral process as including registration of voters, identifying the political parties to vote for, voting, counting of votes, and declaration of election results (cited in Adebajo et al., 2023). Beetham (1999), critiques the electoral process through a framework of democratic audit. He argues that the electoral process is only democratic if it includes widespread participation, is free from manipulation, and allows for genuine competition. He also highlights that the process should promote equality of political influence and ensure that elected officials are accountable to voters. The electoral process is about mechanism used in electing people into political offices to allocate resources in a political system. If electing leadership into political power is flawed with insecurity,

the credible people can be scared away and the end product will be poor governance. To this end, the election is perceived as a substitute for violence and a way of achieving good governance.

Political Participation

Almond and Powel (1975) see political participation as the involvement of members of society in the decision-making process of the system. The almond definition is inclusive in nature. According to him, 'members' means all the adults of the society, including women, who are eligible to vote and to be contested in elections. Robert (1972) defines political participation as those voluntary activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers directly or indirectly. Anifowose (2004) defines political participation as those voluntary activities such as holding public and party office, being a candidate for office, attending election campaigns, voting, and exposing oneself to political stimuli. In the same vein, Sanghera (2005) sees political participation as the active engagement by individuals and groups with governmental processes that affect their lives, and this encompasses both involvement in decision-making and acts of opposition. According to Verba (1995), political participation affords citizens in a democracy an opportunity to communicate information to government officials about their concerns and preferences and to put pressure on them to respond. It means that in any democratic system citizens have the right to express their views and attitude towards almost everything in the public sphere or concerning their interests in a way that government officials know this and respond.

Political participation refers to the participation of individuals or people in the political process, and it ensures that individuals, irrespective of gender, can take part in deciding the common goals of the society and the best way to achieve them. For this research, women's political participation means the legally guaranteed right and opportunity accorded to women, like their male counterparts, to participate and to be included in all political activities as voters, contestants, and the privilege to hold office at different levels of government.

Gender Equality

Gender inequality is a system of social structures and practices that systematically advantage men over women. Sen (2001) frames gender inequality as a violation of basic human capabilities, where women and girls, in particular, are systematically deprived of opportunities for education, employment, and healthcare, which impedes their ability to lead fulfilling lives. Connell (2018) conceptualises gender inequality within the framework of hegemonic masculinity, where power relations between genders are shaped by dominant forms of masculinity that marginalise not only women but also other men who do not conform to these ideals. Adeosun and Owolabi's (2021) study examined how gender inequality affects income in Nigeria. They used data from a survey to show that women earn less than men in many parts of Nigeria. They found that where you live, what you do for a job, and whether you are married can all affect how much money you make. Phil Chibuikem's (2022) research on gender equality in Nigeria highlights its crucial role in achieving national development. He analysed the country's progress in education and employment to assess gender equality and found that the government needs to do more to meet gender equality

goals. Atim and Awodola's (2020) study focuses on the undervaluation of women's unpaid domestic work, arguing for a more gender-balanced approach to labour division. They emphasise the socio-cultural barriers and gender stereotypes that contribute to women's economic marginalisation in Nigeria. In the political realm, Anne (1995) highlights that gender inequality in politics often stems from the lack of women in decision-making positions, resulting in policies that neglect women's needs and perspectives. While Norris and Inglehart (2003) focus on cultural and societal norm**s** that hinder women's political participation. They argue that deep-rooted cultural attitudes and traditional gender roles often limit women's entry into politics and influence public perceptions of female leaders.

Patriarchy

Learner (1989) describes patriarchy as the institutionalised system of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. However, it does not imply that women are either powerless or deprived of rights, influence, and resources. According to Hartman (1997), patriarchy is a set of social relations that has a material base and in which there are hierarchical relations between men and solidarity among them, which enables them to dominate women. Hartman goes on to explain that the material base of patriarchy is men's control over women's labour power, a control maintained by excluding women from access to necessary economically productive resources and reducing their sexuality. Eisenstein (1979) posited that patriarchy consists of a sexual hierarchy that is manifested in the women's role as mothers, domestic labourers, and consumers within the family. It is important to notice that patriarchy is autonomous from and interdependent to other forms of oppression, and this is mainly due to the gendered nature of hierarchy. According to Morrissey (2003), patriarchy consists of the structure of power in society between the tsar and his servitors, the lord and his serfs, the husband and his wife, the master and his apprentice, the officer and his soldiers, and so forth. Power distribution takes place in a binary mechanism, and it subordinates the other.

In feminist theory, the concept of patriarchy often includes all the social mechanisms that reproduce and exert male domination over women. Most forms of feminism characterise patriarchy as an unjust social system that is oppressive to women (Tickner, 2001). Radical feminists emphasise the patriarchal roots of inequality between men and women and think that society is an oppressive patriarchy that primarily oppresses women. Put differently, they emphasise the social domination of women by men. Radical feminists perceive patriarchy as dividing rights, privileges, and power to the disadvantage of women. Thus, they view it as the root cause of most serious social problems and are sceptical of political action within the prevalent social system. Toeing in line with the above argument, Ejumudo (2013) asserted that this male-dominated culture, which has accorded women an inferior and secondary position in society and promoted male supremacy, remains embedded, obscured, and protected within traditional institutions and structures held in abeyance and relative utmost sacredness.

Thus, analysis of various perceptions of patriarchy given above reveals that patriarchy is a combination of various ideas, and no single definition is acceptable as a general definition. In essence, therefore, patriarchy is a system of male domination, marginalisation, and exclusion of women, a system where men have a disproportionately large share of power and influence over women. This implies the institution of male rule and privilege and is dependent on female subordination. For this research, patriarchy is a system of male domination that sees women as an inferior group in society and accords them a secondary position in participating in or contact with what is believed to be the space of greatest power politically, culturally, religiously, and economically.

Women's Political participation in the Nigeria General election from 1999 to 2023

The participation of women in Nigeria's general elections from 1999 to 2023 has seen gradual but limited progress, reflecting broader global movements toward gender equality in political representation. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed an increasing awareness of the need for women's involvement in politics. However, despite legal frameworks and advocacy efforts aimed at enhancing women's representation, the level of female participation in elections, especially in elective positions, remains significantly lower than that of men. Various socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers have hindered women's full integration into the political process, contributing to their underrepresentation in decision-making roles (Adamu, 2023).

During this period, women made notable strides in voting participation, advocacy, and leadership in civil society, but these advances did not translate proportionately into political offices. While women have served in key government positions, including ministerial and legislative roles, the overall number of female candidates elected into office has remained marginal. Omolara (cited in Adamu, 2023) observes that Nigerian women have actively sought political office at various levels but have faced limited success in winning elections since 1999. Omolara's analysis of women's participation in the 2015 general elections and Abdussalam and Zahra's (2019) analysis of the 2019 general elections highlight the ongoing underrepresentation of women in leadership and decision-making positions, which continues to marginalise them disproportionately.

Table 1 below clearly illustrates the significant underrepresentation of women in elected positions in Nigeria. Of the seven female deputy governors in the 2023 general elections, only one is from Kaduna State. Additionally, out of the 48 elected women in state houses of assembly, only two represented Kaduna State, specifically the Sanga and Lere Constituencies (Dataphyte Report). These figures highlight the ongoing marginalisation of women in Nigerian politics, particularly in Kaduna State.

Table 1: Women's representation in elective positions from 1991 to 2023

Office	Available seat	1999 women	2003 women	2007 women	2011 women	2015 women	2019 Women	2023 Women
President	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vice President	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Senate	109	3	4	9	7	7	7	3
House of representative	360	12	23	27	26	20	11	15
Governor	36	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Deputy Governor	36	1	2	6	3	6	4	7
State House of Assembly	990	12	38	54	62		40	48

Source: Adopted from Adamu 2023 and researcher compilation from numerous source

Challenges affecting women's participation in the electoral process in Nigeria

Cultural and Traditional Norms

Nigeria's deeply rooted patriarchal system often discourages women from pursuing leadership roles. Cultural expectations and gender roles place women primarily in domestic spheres, making it harder for them to be seen as leaders or decision-makers in politics. Women (including Nigerian women), according to Muoghalu and Abrifor, cited in Nwabunkeonye (2014), are discouraged from participating in public life from childhood through adulthood by authority figures such as husbands, fathers, mothers and other relations due to cultural image of a virtuous woman defined as quiet, submissive who should be seen and not heard. Because of the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society, most Nigerians, including women, still believe and accept the traditional perspectives that view women as inferior to men, second-class citizens, weaker sex, to be seen and not heard, child bearers/ primary caregivers, etc. Religious practices, particularly in Northern Nigeria, are used to exclude women from political participation. The purdah system, which restricts women's movement, prevents them from voting, running for office, or participating in campaigns. While Islam allows women to play supportive roles in political leadership, their decision-making power is limited (cited in Nwabunkeonye, 2014).

Economic Barriers: Politics in Nigeria is often expensive, with campaigns requiring significant financial resources. Many women lack the economic power or access to funding needed to compete with their male counterparts, who typically dominate the political landscape. Udoms (2024) asserted that politics is a costly endeavour that most women cannot afford. Due to their limited involvement in profitable businesses and high-paying jobs, many women lack the financial resources necessary to participate in political activities. From consultation fees to expression of interest forms, the expenses associated with politics are too high for most women.

Political Violence and Intimidation: The political environment in Nigeria can be hostile, with reports of violence, harassment, and intimidation during elections. Women are often

disproportionately affected by this, deterring them from actively participating in politics or running for office. According to Adamu (2024), Political violence, including the involvement of thugs and resulting insecurity, deters women from participating in politics in Nigeria. The fear of violence, which can lead to loss of life and property, discourages many women from entering the political arena.

Party Structures and Gender Bias: Political parties in Nigeria are often dominated by men, and women are frequently excluded from leadership positions**.** This male-dominated environment makes it difficult for women to advance within party structures and secure nominations for elected office. Okoosi-Simbine, cited in Udoms (2024), identifies several factors that hinder women's political participation in Nigeria**.** These factors include the high cost of candidate nomination, the prevalence of money politics, the influence of party elders and gatekeepers, and the threat of political violence. These challenges, combined with the broader gender dynamics within Nigerian politics, make it difficult for women to enter and succeed in the political arena.

Lack of Mentorship and Support: In Nigeria's male-dominated political scene, a major hurdle for women is the lack of mentorship and support. Aspiring female politicians often struggle to find experienced leaders to guide them. Without established networks or mentors offering advice, women face difficulties navigating the political system, building alliances, and gaining the confidence to compete. This lack of mentorship also limits women's access to crucial resources and skills. Mentorship is vital for building leadership qualities and creating opportunities for women in politics. However, a 2022 report by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) highlights the weakness or absence of such support frameworks in many parts of Nigeria.

Legal and Institutional Barriers: Although Nigeria has made progress in promoting women's rights, there is still a gap in enforcing laws and policies that encourage gender equality in political representation. Quota systems or affirmative action policies are either weak or inadequately implemented. Legal and institutional barriers continue to hinder women's political participation in Nigeria. Despite ratifying international conventions like CEDAW, weak enforcement and a lack of gender quotas prevent women from gaining equitable political representation. Political parties, dominated by men, often control nominations, further sidelining women. Additionally, Nigeria's electoral laws do not offer sufficient protections or incentives for women to enter politics.

Limited Access to Education and Information: In some parts of Nigeria, particularly rural areas, women have limited access to education and information, which reduces their awareness and capacity to engage in political processes. Limited access to education and information is a major obstacle to women’s political participation in Nigeria. Many women, particularly in rural areas, have lower literacy rates and fewer opportunities to access political knowledge and civic education. This educational gap reduces their awareness of political processes, their rights, and the skills needed to engage in leadership roles. Without access to proper information, women are often excluded from decision-making, and their voices are not heard in critical political discussions. A 2023 report by UNESCO highlights that inadequate educational infrastructure and socio-cultural barriers contribute to women’s lack of political involvement in Nigeria.

Societal Perception and Stereotyping: Women in politics are often subject to negative stereotypes, with society questioning their leadership capabilities or dismissing their political ambitions as secondary to family responsibilities. Nwabunkeonye (2014) asserted that women who are actively involved in politics are often labelled and treated as individuals of questionable character, such as being called prostitutes, wayward, overly assertive, or rebellious against cultural norms. During campaigns, political opponents, typically men, frequently exploit these stereotypes, publicly attacking the moral integrity of female politicians. As a result, these women face public humiliation and social stigmatisation from both men and women. This use of derogatory labels, insults, and abusive language discourages many women from participating in the country's political arena.

These challenges collectively hinder women's ability to actively participate and compete in Nigeria's political sphere, perpetuating gender inequality in governance and decision-making processes.

Review of Empirical Studies.

Bryon's (2024) study reveals that deep-rooted societal norms and expectations significantly hinder women's participation in Nigerian politics. These cultural barriers, often rooted in traditional gender roles, perpetuate the perception that politics is a male-dominated domain. Discrimination, violence, and economic disparities further discourage women from entering politics.

Toeing toward economic constraints on women's political participation Danbala, et al (2024) study reveals that despite increased workforce participation, Nigerian women continue to face significant barriers to economic empowerment and entrepreneurship**.** Persistent gender inequalities persist in pay, working conditions, and leadership roles. While women constitute a majority of Nigeria's population, their numerical strength hasn't translated into commensurate representation in leadership positions. Cultural and religious norms often relegate women to secondary roles, hindering their political and economic advancement. These entrenched barriers hinder women's ability to participate in the workforce and achieve their economic potential fully.

In addition, Okunnu's (2024) study reveals that In Northern Nigeria, culture and religion are deeply intertwined, reinforcing patriarchal norms that often marginalise women. This cultural imposition, which restricts women's roles to domestic spheres, is exemplified by former President Muhammadu Buhari's humorous statement suggesting that his wife's place is in the "kitchen and the other room." While criticised, this statement reflects a common societal belief about women's roles in the region. This view is corroborated by Abdussalam and Zahra (2019) in their study on women's participation and political process in the 2019 general election in Kaduna State, found that patriarchal structures persisted within the political processes of Kaduna State during the 2019 general elections. This persistent patriarchy continues to hinder women's participation in electoral politics, as evidenced by the low number of women in elected positions in subsequent elections, including the 2023 general elections.

In the same vein, Ogunbumi (2024) argues that the existence of Violence against Women in Politics (VAWIP) is not just denying female politicians a level playing ground but is also

preventing those women or young girls who have the intention of participating in politics and governance of Nigeria to jettison their ambitions. This study, therefore, agrees with Soudani and Abbes (cited in Ogunbumi, 2024) that the acts of violence that target women active in civil and political life have a dissuasive effect on any female citizen who has the will or intention to become a public figure or a politically active person. The cynical argument that politics is brutal and that criticism and attack are inevitable for women seeking to compete with men in a traditionally male-dominated sphere simply normalises such violence against women in the field of politics.

Theoretical Framework

This work adopts Liberal Democratic Theory and Liberal Feminism as a theoretical framework to assess women's participation in elective positions in the Kaduna North Local Government Area. Liberal democratic theory and liberal feminism provide valuable frameworks for analysing women's electoral participation in Kaduna North Local Government. Liberal democracy emphasises individual liberty, equality before the law, and the rule of law, while liberal feminism, on the other hand, focuses on the specific gender-based barriers that women face, such as cultural norms and institutional discrimination, advocating for reforms to ensure gender equality in political participation (Tong, 2009). Liberal feminism emphasises the need for women to have equal access to political opportunities, such as running for office and holding elected positions. (Nienaber and Moraka 2016) The theory exemplified the beginning of representative democracy. Also, the rationale and application of equality as a principle of liberal democracy, limiting the power of the government by law and the right of the citizens to enjoy freedom of association and to compete for political office in a free and fair election. This showcases the relevance of the theory to the work in the sense that equality is among the tenets of democracy which shows that every individual has an equal right to participate in the political process as well as run for political or elective office irrespective of gender. Also, Liberal feminism, with its emphasis on women's rights and freedom to participate fully in electoral politics within a democratic system, offers a valuable theoretical framework for understanding the challenges faced by women in Kaduna North Local Government. This feminist perspective highlights the gender-based barriers, including cultural norms and institutional discrimination, that continue to hinder women's active participation in the electoral process, mirroring the broader challenges faced by women in Nigeria.

Methodology

This paper utilises a secondary data analysis approach. Data was collected from existing literature, including textbooks, journals, seminar proceedings, and newspapers. Additionally, official documents from relevant institutions like the State Independent Electoral Commission (SIECOM) and the Centre for Democracy and Development were consulted.

Women's Participation in Kaduna North Local Government Election from 2018 to 2021: An Appraisal

Local government elections in Kaduna State, including Kaduna North, are held every three years, following the guidelines of the Kaduna State Independent Electoral Commission (KADSIEC) and

in accordance with the Nigerian Constitution, which mandates elections for local government councils every three years.

Kaduna North Local Government Area (LGA) consists of 12 wards, which are the smallest administrative and electoral units within the local government. The wards in Kaduna North LGA are:Badarawa/Malali, Unguwan Dosa, Unguwan Sarki, Unguwan Shanu, Unguwan Liman, Unguwan Kanawa, Kawo, Hayin Banki, Dadi Riba, Gabasawa, Shaba and Unguwan Maikeri. These wards play a crucial role in the electoral process, with councillors elected at the ward level, while the local government chairman is elected at the LGA level.

In the 2018 Kaduna North Local Government election, no woman was elected to any of the available positions. By 2021, only one woman, Fatima Masa'ud, under the All Progressive Congress (APC), contested for the office of vice-chairman but was not successful. In both the 2018 and 2021 elections, there were no significant reports of women being elected to major political offices such as local government chairperson. Like many other parts of Nigeria, Kaduna's political scene has traditionally been male-dominated, particularly at the local government level.

Nevertheless, under the leadership of Governor Nasir El-Rufai, Kaduna State has made efforts to promote gender inclusivity. His administration has appointed more women to key positions at the state level and has actively encouraged female participation in politics at the local level compared to the current administration.

Table 2 below demonstrates the complete absence of women in elected positions in Kaduna North Local Government, with zero female representatives in both the 2018 and 2021 local government elections. This highlights the severe underrepresentation of women in local government governance in this particular region.

Table 2: Women's Participation in Kaduna North Local Government Election from 2018 to 2021

Office	Available seats	2018 women	2021 women
Chairman	1	0	0
Vice chairman	1	0	0
Councillor	12	0	0

Source: Adapted from SIECOM 2021.

Factors Hindering Women's Political Participation in Kaduna State

Over the last two decades, there has been a noticeable increase in women's political participation in Nigeria, measured by factors such as voter turnout, public office holdings, and women-focused policies. Despite these gains, women remain significantly underrepresented in elective positions due to various obstacles.

Male Domination

Ejumudo (2013) argues that Nigeria's patriarchal culture, which views men as superior and women as secondary, impedes women's political participation. This cultural bias is supported by Sylvia and Ogugua (2012), who note that practices like son preference and restricted inheritance rights further disadvantage women. Additionally, Omadjohwoefe (2011) highlights how religious myths and doctrines have historically justified and reinforced women's inferior status in society, affecting their political involvement.

Cultural Norms

Traditional gender roles and societal expectations often confine women to domestic responsibilities, limiting their access to professional and political opportunities (Kolawole et al., 2012). Leke (2015) notes that both cultural factors and perceived biological differences contribute to women's marginalisation, though the notion of biological determinism is increasingly challenged. Adeniyi (2011) and Olurode (2013) argue that cultural factors, rather than biological differences, play a more significant role in gender role assignment and political exclusion.

Educational disparities

The National Adult Literacy Survey (2017) and UNESCO (2018) reveal that women in northern Nigeria have lower literacy rates compared to men and women in the south, impacting their qualifications for political office. Traditional societal views on women's education and roles, as highlighted by Ozigbo (1998), reveal that women are seen to belong to the home and incapable of making sound decisions, further limiting their opportunities in the political realm.

Religion

In Nigeria, religion plays an important role in virtually everything that happens, women are enjoined by the Christian and Muslim tenets to be submissive to the male folk. In the north, the practice of purdah is a disincentive to women's active political participation (Danbala, 2024).

Economic Factor

Financial constraints and an unsafe political environment significantly hinder women's political participation in Nigeria. As Ogbonna (2009) and Asase (2003) note, the high cost of running for office, often referred to as "money politics," poses a major barrier for women candidates. Yahaya (2012) further emphasises that financial challenges, combined with societal expectations favouring male candidates, make it difficult for women to compete effectively in elections. The substantial financial resources required for political campaigns create a significant hurdle for women, who often lack the necessary funds (Nda, 2003). This financial disadvantage is exacerbated by patriarchal norms that limit women's economic independence and their reliance on male breadwinners, diminishing their ability to fund political campaigns and engage in politics. Table 3 below illustrates the exorbitant costs of nomination forms for various political offices. Despite the APC's exemption of female aspirants from payment and the PDP's 50% reduction, the number of female contestants remained disappointingly low (Itodo, 2022; Iwok, 2022). The APC had only

103 female candidates, while the PDP had 72 (Okedele, 2024). These statistics underscore the significant barrier posed by the high cost of running for political office, which extends far beyond the procurement of nomination forms. The financial burden of campaigning, including advertising, transportation, and grassroots mobilisation, remains a formidable obstacle for many women aspiring to political positions.

Table 3: Cost of Nomination Fee for the 2023 General Election.

Name of Political Party	President Aspirant	Governor Aspirant	Senatorial Aspirant	House of Representative	State House of Assembly
APC	N100 million	N50 million	N20 million	N10 million	N20 million
PDP	N40 million	N21 million	N3.5 million	N2.5 million	N600,000
LP	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Source: Adapted from Okedele, 2024.

Electoral Violence

Moreover, the Nigerian political landscape is fraught with **violence and intimidation,** further deterring women from participating. The prevalence of electoral violence and the hostile environment, characterised by threats and physical attacks, has made political involvement dangerous for women (Ngara & Ayabam, 2013; Luka, 2011). In Kaduna state, political violence has been a persistent issue, significantly affecting female candidates' ability to participate.

Institutional factors

The type of electoral system and the lack of gender quotas impact women's representation. Studies indicate that proportional representation systems are more conducive to increasing female political participation than majoritarian systems. The nature of Nigerian politics, characterised by a focus on personal and sectional interests rather than public good, coupled with institutional factors, significantly hinders women's political participation. Elections are often fiercely competitive and may involve unethical tactics, such as manipulation and violence. Antonia (2012) identifies five key factors related to political practices in Nigeria that constrain women's participation: expensive candidate nomination, excessive use of money, influence of party elders, deliberate obstruction by party officials, and physical violence and intimidation. These factors, combined with institutional barriers, create a challenging environment for women seeking political office in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the multifaceted challenges hindering women's participation in Nigerian politics are deeply rooted in societal norms, cultural practices, and economic disparities. Deep-seated cultural barriers, often reinforced by religious beliefs, perpetuate traditional gender roles that confine women to domestic spheres. These cultural constraints, coupled with discriminatory practices,

violence, and economic inequalities, create a hostile environment for women aspiring to political positions. While significant progress has been made in recent years, with the number of female appointees in Kaduna State, addressing these entrenched barriers remains crucial for achieving true gender equality and ensuring that women have an equal voice in the political landscape of Nigeria as a whole and Kaduna North Local Government to be specific.

To foster greater women's participation in politics, the study proposed the following recommendations:

- **Establish a platform for women's leadership training:** Provide women with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the political landscape.
- **Promote inclusivity:** Create an inclusive environment for women's participation in leadership, civic engagement, and decision-making at all levels.
- **Educate women:** Empower women through education to combat inferiority complexes and build confidence.
- **Create enabling environments within political parties:** Foster inclusive spaces for women's meaningful participation in decision-making processes.
- **Implement gender quotas:** Establish minimum quotas for women's representation in elective positions at all levels of government.
- **Strengthen enforcement mechanisms:** Establish an Election Task Force to curb electoral violence and ensure adherence to affirmative action policies.

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