

**WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF  
SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF BAUCHI STATE (2011 – 2019)**

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**Abstract**

Women's participation in political leadership is integral to democratic development and the promotion of inclusive governance. In Nigeria, despite constitutional guarantees and international commitments to gender equality, the political space remains largely male-dominated. This article critically examines women's political participation in Nigeria, with a specific focus on Bauchi State between 2011 and 2019. Drawing entirely from secondary sources, it evaluates the national context of women's involvement in politics, the local manifestations of gender inequality in Bauchi, and the factors limiting effective female political engagement in the state. The study utilizes a descriptive analytical method, relying on scholarly publications, electoral commission reports, government policy documents, and reports from national and international organizations. Findings reveal that although women constitute nearly half of Nigeria's population and electorate, they remain severely underrepresented in decision-making positions. In Bauchi State, deeply entrenched socio-cultural norms, religious conservatism, economic disenfranchisement, political party gatekeeping, and institutional weaknesses significantly curtail women's access to leadership roles. The study argues that while national policies such as the National Gender Policy and international frameworks like CEDAW offer a foundation for progress, implementation at the sub-national level remains superficial or absent. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for enforceable affirmative action policies, gender-sensitive electoral reforms, and the dismantling of systemic barriers within party politics. It recommends enhanced civic education, institutional restructuring, and strategic alliances between state actors and civil society to foster a more inclusive political culture in Bauchi and Nigeria at large.

***Keywords:* Women, Political Participation, Gender Inequality, Democratic Inclusion, Nigeria.**

## **Introduction**

Political participation is a cornerstone of democratic governance and an essential vehicle for achieving inclusive development. In theory, democracy guarantees equal rights and representation for all citizens. In practice, however, political power in many societies including Nigeria remains disproportionately concentrated in the hands of men. Despite decades of advocacy and policy reforms, women's representation in Nigerian politics continues to be alarmingly low. This democratic shortfall is especially pronounced in northern Nigeria, where cultural, religious, and institutional norms intersect to constrain female political agency. In the Nigerian context, the marginalization of women in governance is not merely a reflection of electoral outcomes but a manifestation of systemic inequalities that have evolved over time. From colonial-era disenfranchisement to post-independence political structures that favor male dominance, the exclusion of women from the political sphere has become normalized. This exclusion persists despite Nigeria's ratification of global conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and national frameworks like the 2006 National Gender Policy, which recommends a 35 percent affirmative action quota for women in governance.

Bauchi State offers a unique case study in this regard. Located in the conservative northeast geopolitical zone, Bauchi reflects the broader gender dynamics of northern Nigeria, where socio-cultural and religious doctrines play an outsized role in public life. While the state has witnessed consistent electoral participation since 1999, female political inclusion remains minimal, with little improvement observed over multiple electoral cycles. The state's political culture, characterized by male-dominated party structures and religious conservatism, continues to hinder the advancement of women in elective and appointive positions. This paper, based entirely on secondary sources, examines the extent and nature of women's political participation in Bauchi State from 2011 to 2019. It analyzes the structural and cultural impediments that inhibit gender parity in politics and explores the implications of women's exclusion on democratic development. The study seeks to contribute to the academic discourse on gender and politics in Nigeria by focusing on the local specificities of Bauchi State, often overlooked in national analyses. By relying on academic literature, policy documents, and institutional reports, the article underscores the need for a recalibration of Nigeria's political institutions toward gender inclusivity.

## **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive research approach relying solely on secondary sources. Data were drawn from academic journals, books, electoral commission reports, policy frameworks, and publications from governmental and non-governmental organizations. Sources such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), UN Women, ActionAid Nigeria, and relevant academic literature on Nigerian politics and gender studies formed the empirical foundation of the research. The study period, 2011 to 2019, was chosen to encompass three general election cycles, providing a temporal framework for evaluating continuity and change in women's political participation. The analysis was structured thematically to interrogate the national context, the specific realities of Bauchi State, and the multiple factors that hinder women's political empowerment. Emphasis was placed on

synthesizing existing knowledge to identify persistent gaps and propose evidence-informed solutions for improved gender representation in Bauchi State and Nigeria.

### **Women and Political Participation in Nigeria**

Women's political participation in Nigeria remains one of the most persistent challenges to democratic consolidation and gender equality. Although women constitute approximately 49 percent of Nigeria's population and are active participants as voters and supporters during elections, their representation in political office has consistently fallen short of national and international benchmarks. From the colonial period to the Fourth Republic, political institutions and social structures have largely excluded women from leadership roles, thereby undermining the inclusivity of the Nigerian state.

Historically, Nigerian women played active roles in governance during the pre-colonial period. Female figures such as Queen Amina of Zazzau and Moremi of Ife demonstrated leadership acumen in both military and civic domains. However, colonialism disrupted these structures by imposing a patriarchal administrative system that relegated women to domestic roles. During the nationalist struggle, women like Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Margaret Ekpo led significant political mobilizations, but these efforts did not translate into sustained political representation post-independence. Women's representation in Nigeria's First Republic was negligible, and military rule further entrenched gender exclusion from formal political spaces.

With the return to democratic rule in 1999, expectations were high that constitutional guarantees and increased civic awareness would lead to gender inclusion in politics. While there has been some improvement, progress has been slow and uneven. For instance, the number of women in the National Assembly has never exceeded 10 percent. In 2007, women held only 6.4 percent of the seats in the House of Representatives and 3.7 percent in the Senate. These numbers declined in subsequent elections. The 2019 general elections, for example, saw women win only 62 out of 2,970 contested positions nationwide just 2.1 percent.

The National Gender Policy of 2006 recommended a minimum 35 percent affirmative action for women's representation in elective and appointive positions. Yet, implementation has been inconsistent and largely symbolic. Legislative attempts to institutionalize gender quotas, such as the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill, have been repeatedly stalled in the National Assembly due to political resistance and socio-cultural opposition. Several interrelated factors explain the poor representation of women in Nigerian politics. These include patriarchal socialization, religious conservatism, political violence, lack of access to campaign financing, and male-dominated party structures. Women are often discouraged from entering politics due to the perception that leadership is a male preserve. Additionally, women are underrepresented in political party leadership, limiting their influence in candidate selection processes.

Despite these barriers, Nigerian women have made important contributions to national development through their roles in civil society, the judiciary, and policy advocacy. Women-led organizations such as the Women in Politics Forum (WIPF), Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC), and BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights have been instrumental in promoting gender-sensitive legislation and voter education. Prominent female politicians such as Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Oby Ezekwesili have also demonstrated that women can lead at the highest levels of governance.

Nonetheless, the prevailing trend remains one of exclusion and tokenism. The gap between policy intent and actual implementation continues to undermine women's political empowerment. For meaningful change to occur, political institutions must move beyond rhetorical commitments to embrace structural reforms that level the playing field for women. The Nigerian experience thus illustrates the paradox of democratic formalism without substantive gender inclusion.

### **Women and Political Participation in Bauchi State**

Bauchi State, situated in Nigeria's North-East geopolitical zone, exemplifies the entrenched gender disparities in political participation characteristic of many northern Nigerian states. Despite the active involvement of women in voting and civic mobilization, their representation in elective and appointive political positions remains minimal. The period between 2011 and 2019 saw little to no improvement in the political inclusion of women in the state, highlighting a persistent democratic deficit.

Bauchi's socio-political environment is shaped by conservative religious doctrines, patriarchal traditions, and cultural norms that reinforce the perception of political leadership as a male-dominated domain. These values significantly influence gender roles and public expectations, thereby limiting women's visibility and voice in the political arena. While women in Bauchi play active roles in electioneering such as campaign mobilization and voter registration drives they are rarely encouraged or supported to vie for positions of political leadership.

Statistical evidence underscores this marginalization. During the 2011 general elections, only 7.7 percent of candidates contesting for political office in Bauchi State were women. This figure declined to 4.4 percent in 2015, and by 2019, no woman was elected into the State House of Assembly or held any top executive position such as commissioner or permanent secretary. Furthermore, none of the 20 local government chairpersonships in the state was occupied by a woman during this period, and fewer than 5 percent of councillorship positions were held by women (BSIEC, 2018). The structural exclusion of women from governance is compounded by the practices of political parties in Bauchi State. Internal party processes often lack gender sensitivity, and party leadership is overwhelmingly male. Women are routinely sidelined during candidate selection processes, and their nominations are often limited to tokenistic roles or constituencies deemed unwinnable. The absence of legally binding gender quotas at the state level further reduces women's chances of political advancement.

Religious conservatism also plays a crucial role in shaping women's political behavior. In many communities within Bauchi, political engagement by women is viewed as incompatible with traditional Islamic values. This perception reinforces the idea that women should remain confined to domestic spaces, deterring many from seeking public office. Even in relatively urbanized LGAs such as Katagum and Misau, educated women often face social disapproval for engaging in partisan politics. Economic marginalization is another significant barrier. Running a successful political campaign in Bauchi requires substantial financial resources, which many women lack due to systemic economic disenfranchisement. With limited access to credit, business capital, or political sponsorship, female aspirants are unable to compete on equal footing with their male counterparts. Additionally, political violence and the threat of electoral intimidation deter many women from entering or remaining in the political arena.

Despite these challenges, civil society groups and international organizations have made efforts to increase women's participation in Bauchi politics. Projects like the Women's Voice and Leadership Nigeria (WVL-N) initiative and interventions by ActionAid Nigeria have provided training, advocacy support, and platforms for engagement. However, their impact remains limited due to the absence of strong institutional backing and political will from the state government. Bauchi State thus reflects the complex interplay of structural, cultural, religious, and institutional forces that hinder gender-inclusive governance. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that goes beyond superficial policy declarations and engages deeply with the local socio-political realities that shape women's exclusion.

### **Factors Limiting Women Participation in Bauchi State**

The underrepresentation of women in Bauchi State politics is the result of interwoven structural, cultural, religious, economic, and institutional barriers. These factors operate at multiple levels individual, community, and institutional creating a socio-political environment that systematically limits women's political participation.

#### **Socio-Cultural Norms and Patriarchy**

Bauchi's society is deeply rooted in patriarchal values that define leadership as an exclusively male prerogative. From early childhood, women are socialized into roles that emphasize obedience, domesticity, and subordination. Political leadership is often perceived as incompatible with these roles, reinforcing the notion that women are unfit or unsuited for public office. As a result, many women internalize these norms and do not consider political leadership a viable aspiration.

#### **Religious Conservatism**

Islam is the dominant religion in Bauchi State, and its conservative interpretations often discourage women from engaging in public life. Religious leaders frequently reinforce narratives that delegitimize female leadership, citing traditional views of modesty and gender roles. While Islam does not inherently prohibit women's political participation, its localized practice in Bauchi often serves to reinforce gender hierarchies and social exclusion.

#### **Political Party Dynamics**

Political parties in Bauchi State serve as gatekeepers to political office. However, they often lack internal democratic processes that accommodate gender inclusion. Women are rarely represented in party leadership, and party structures are organized in ways that privilege male dominance. Party nomination processes tend to favor wealthy, connected male aspirants, leaving women at a distinct disadvantage. Additionally, party meetings and campaigns are often held at night or in informal male-dominated spaces, making it difficult for women to participate fully.

#### **Economic Disempowerment**

The cost of contesting elections in Nigeria is prohibitively high, and women in Bauchi are economically disadvantaged relative to men. Political campaigns require funding for logistics,

media outreach, mobilization, and security. Given their limited access to credit and fewer opportunities for wealth accumulation, women are less likely to afford competitive political campaigns. Furthermore, political financiers and sponsors (godfathers) are more inclined to support male candidates perceived as more "viable."

### **Political Violence and Intimidation**

The electoral environment in Bauchi is often marred by violence, intimidation, and harassment, which disproportionately affect women. Female aspirants face threats to their physical safety and personal dignity, including gender-based violence and character assassination. These risks discourage many women from contesting elections, especially in rural areas where protection mechanisms are limited.

### **Weak Legal Frameworks and Policy Implementation**

Although Nigeria has endorsed several international frameworks promoting gender equality, such as CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action, the domestication and enforcement of these instruments remain weak. The National Gender Policy's recommendation of 35 percent representation for women in politics has not been implemented meaningfully in Bauchi. Without binding legislation or quotas, efforts to increase women's participation remain rhetorical.

### **Lack of Education and Political Awareness**

Low literacy rates and limited civic education among women, especially in rural Bauchi, reduce their ability to engage meaningfully in politics. Many women lack information on political rights, party platforms, or the electoral process. This informational gap limits their ability to vote wisely, contest elections, or hold political office.

### **Domestic Responsibilities and Time Constraints**

Women in Bauchi bear the brunt of household and childcare responsibilities, which limits their time and energy for political engagement. The lack of institutional support such as childcare services or family-friendly work schedules makes it difficult for women to balance domestic and political commitments.

### **Tokenism and Symbolic Representation**

When women are appointed or nominated, it is often as a symbolic gesture rather than a commitment to gender equity. These token appointments rarely place women in positions with real influence, and they often lack the institutional support needed to make meaningful contributions.

### **Conclusion**

Women's political participation is both a democratic necessity and a human rights imperative. In Nigeria and particularly in Bauchi State persistent gender disparities in political representation reflect a broader failure to actualize inclusive governance. This paper, relying exclusively on secondary sources, has examined the historical, structural, and cultural contexts that have shaped women's exclusion from politics in Bauchi between 2011 and 2019. Despite formal legal guarantees, constitutional provisions, and ratification of international gender

equity instruments, women's involvement in political decision-making remains disturbingly low.

The analysis reveals that women in Bauchi are confronted with a constellation of barriers—ranging from patriarchal socialization and religious conservatism to economic disenfranchisement and political violence. Political parties remain a significant obstacle, with internal practices that exclude women from leadership roles and competitive candidacies. Economic constraints, coupled with limited access to campaign financing, further entrench gender inequality in the political landscape. Even where women are politically active, their roles are often confined to peripheral or tokenistic positions, lacking substantive influence or decision-making power. Moreover, the state's failure to domesticate and implement national and international gender policies has exacerbated the gap between policy declarations and political reality. Civil society interventions and donor-supported initiatives have made some progress, but their impact has been stifled by the lack of political will and structural resistance from within the political system.

The case of Bauchi State underscores the broader national challenges facing Nigeria in its pursuit of gender-inclusive governance. Until women are adequately represented in the political process, democracy in Nigeria will remain fundamentally incomplete. A transformative shift is required one that dismantles patriarchal structures, reforms political institutions, and empowers women to fully engage in shaping public policy and governance. Women's political participation must be understood not as a charitable concession, but as an indispensable component of democratic development, social justice, and sustainable peace.

## **Recommendations**

To redress the underrepresentation of women in Bauchi State's political landscape and ensure gender-inclusive governance, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The Bauchi State government, in collaboration with the federal legislature, should adopt and enforce legally binding gender quotas for elective and appointive positions. The National Assembly should prioritize the passage of the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill. At the state level, gender mainstreaming must be institutionalized across government structures, backed by concrete monitoring mechanisms.
2. Political parties must reform their internal processes to include gender-sensitive candidate nomination, leadership training, and support for female aspirants. Parties should adopt gender parity charters and ensure women are represented in executive committees at all levels. Women's wings of parties must be strengthened and given meaningful roles in strategy and decision-making.
3. Access to political finance is crucial for leveling the playing field. Government and donor agencies should establish dedicated funds and grants to support women's political campaigns. Capacity-building initiatives should also focus on financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and resource mobilization for female aspirants.
4. Targeted civic education campaigns are essential to improve political awareness among women, especially in rural areas. These programs should include workshops, media outreach, and community dialogues on women's political rights and leadership

potential. Integrating gender studies into the school curriculum will also foster long-term cultural change.

5. Community gatekeepers, including religious and traditional leaders, must be engaged as partners in promoting women's political inclusion. Sensitization programs that align women's participation with religious and cultural values can help shift prevailing narratives and reduce resistance.

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