

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN OYO STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the levels, roles and participation of women in Oyo State politics, Nigeria, within the timeframe of 2011 to 2024. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of women's political engagement. Quantitative data, derived from questionnaires, were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data from interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses were analyzed thematically. The findings reveal that despite progress in women's political representation, significant challenges persist. These include gender inequality and discrimination, societal stereotypes and cultural norms, sexual harassment and violence, political violence and intimidation and limited access to education, finance and resources. The study also highlights the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within political parties and the weak enforcement and low awareness of affirmative action policies. In conclusion, gender disparities in political representation continue to hinder women's full participation in Oyo State politics.

Introduction

Good governance necessitates the equitable representation of all groups within a society, ensuring that diverse voices, including those of women, are heard in the political arena (Dar, S. A., & Shairgojri, A. A. 2022). While women's participation in politics is crucial, their involvement remains low globally, particularly in Nigeria, where it has been a long-standing issue. Despite recent progress, Nigeria's patriarchal history has posed challenges to women's political engagement. Historically, women were excluded from political participation in Nigeria, both during the colonial era and after independence (Okonkwo, I. D. 2025). The colonial administration's indirect rule system favored male leaders, further marginalizing women. However, the Nigerian women's

The study recommends strengthening policy implementation, enforcing laws against harassment and intimidation and providing training, mentorship programs and increased support for women's political initiatives.

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movement has persistently advocated for women's rights and political inclusion since the 1970s. This movement, spearheaded by women activists, has organized demonstrations and campaigns to promote women's involvement in politics and decision-making (Jacob, U., Nwigwe, N., & Ikedinma, A. 2023).

The establishment of the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) in 1959 marked a significant milestone, as it became a powerful advocate for women's political engagement and gender equality. The persistent efforts of the NCWS and other women's organizations led to the adoption of the National Gender Policy in 1995, aimed at advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. A turning point occurred in 1999 with the restoration of civilian authority, allowing women to contest political offices. Although women faced obstacles such as violence, intimidation and prejudice, some achieved prominent positions, with Stella Obasanjo becoming Nigeria's first lady. Since then, there has been gradual improvement in women's political representation, with a record number elected to the Nigerian parliament in 2019. Women now constitute 6.5% of the Senate and 7.3% of the House of Representatives. While this progress is commendable, it still falls short of the government's 35% affirmative action target (Salaudeen, A., & Jiddere, A. J. 2024).

The Nigerian women's movement has played a vital role in advocating for gender equality and women's political participation, raising awareness and influencing policies (Akinwale, A. A. 2023). However, significant efforts are still needed to ensure equal opportunities for women in politics. This study, therefore, examines the level, roles and participation of women in Oyo State politics.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria, like many African nations, has a history of patriarchal dominance that has limited women's political participation. These challenges include a lack of support from political parties, financial constraints, limited access to support networks, restricted advancement opportunities within political parties and sexual harassment and violence. The fight for women's political participation has been significantly aided by the Nigerian

women's movement. The movement has been successful in spreading awareness of the value of women's input in decision-making and has had an impact on legislation and policies that support gender equality. Yet much work needs to be done to guarantee that women have equal opportunity to participate in politics. Thus, the study is examining the level, roles and participation of women in politics in Oyo state. Also, the obstacles they face and strategies to overcome these obstacles to enhance their participation.

Scope of the Study

The study focuses on women's participation in Oyo State politics, the obstacles they encounter and strategies to overcome these obstacles to increase their participation. The timeframe is from 2011 to 2024, considering the levels of women's representation during the tenures of Governors Ajimobi and Makinde.

Literature Review

The participation of women in politics is crucial for achieving sustainable development, equality and peace. However, despite advancements in gender equality, women's involvement in politics remains a challenge in many nations (Akinwale, A. A. 2023). Studies indicate a correlation between women's political participation and improved social welfare, reduced corruption and better governance (Lovenduski, J., 2020).

Several factors contribute to the limited participation of women in Nigerian politics. These include societal and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination. Traditional gender roles often prioritize women's domestic responsibilities over their active involvement in public life. Women may also face violence and intimidation in their pursuit of political roles, which creates a hostile environment. Additionally, limited access to education and resources further hinders women's involvement in politics (Bako, M. J., & Syed, J. 2018).

To address these challenges, it is crucial to challenge and change societal and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination. This requires comprehensive efforts at multiple levels, including awareness campaigns, education programs and policy reforms that promote gender equality and create an enabling environment for women's participation in politics (Dhiman, D. B. 2023).

Theoretical Framework

The study's theoretical foundation is built upon feminist principles, primarily drawing from feminist theory and its application to the political sphere, feminist political theory. Feminist theory serves as a broad framework that critically examines the power imbalances and societal norms that perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination (Dill, B. T., & Kohlman, M. H. 2012). It advocates for achieving gender equality and social

justice by challenging traditional structures that disadvantage women. This theory also emphasizes the importance of recognizing how gender intersects with other social categories, such as race, class and sexuality, to create unique experiences of oppression (Acker, S. 1987). Feminist political theory specifically focuses on the gendered dynamics within the political arena. It analyzes how power operates to marginalize women in political institutions and critiques the patriarchal systems that uphold male dominance. This theoretical lens helps to understand the obstacles women face in accessing and participating in political processes (Martin, P. 2004).

The study's core focus aligns strongly with these feminist theoretical perspectives. The investigation into women's participation in Oyo State politics, the identification of challenges like gender inequality and violence and the call for transformative change all resonate with the central concerns of feminist theory. Furthermore, the research problem which aim to understand how societal norms contribute to gender-based discrimination and how policies can promote women's inclusion, directly apply the principles of feminist political theory. The study's recognition of the need to challenge gendered norms and stereotypes in politics is also a key reflection of feminist thought. Ultimately, the recommendations for inclusive strategies to address women's political participation are rooted in feminist theory's commitment to social change.

However, there are areas where the study could expand its theoretical engagement. While it acknowledges the concept of intersectionality, the primary emphasis remains on gender. A more in-depth exploration of how other social identities, such as class or ethnicity, intersect with gender to shape the political experiences of women in Oyo State would add greater nuance to the analysis. Additionally, the study could benefit from a more detailed discussion of the various strands within feminist theory, such as liberal feminism or radical feminism, to explicitly position its approach and provide a richer theoretical context for its findings and policy recommendations. While the study touches on power dynamics, incorporating broader theoretical perspectives on power, beyond feminist theory, could offer additional insights into the structural barriers that impede women's political participation in Oyo State. Finally, explicitly connecting the study's findings to broader theoretical debates on participation, democracy and governance, in addition to the feminist framework, would further strengthen its theoretical grounding. By addressing these potential gaps and incorporating these additional theoretical dimensions, the study provides a more comprehensive and theoretically robust analysis of women's political participation in Oyo State.

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive research design to characterize a phenomenon or population, specifically to understand women's political engagement and contributions in Nigeria.

The study population includes women in elected offices (e.g., ministers, governors), women in political parties, female civil servants and women in various organizations in Oyo State.

A simple random sampling technique was used to select participants, ensuring each member of the population has an equal chance of being included. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula to ensure adequate representation and statistical power.

The primary research instrument is questionnaire, designed to gather data on the roles, participation levels and obstacles faced by women in Oyo State politics. The questionnaire included both open-ended and closed-ended questions to collect qualitative and quantitative data.

The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods for data analysis. Quantitative data, derived from the questionnaires, were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. Inferential statistics, including regression analysis and ANOVA, were employed with SPSS version 25 to explore relationships and patterns within the data. Qualitative data, gathered from interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses, were analyzed thematically to identify recurring themes and gain deeper insights into the experiences and perspectives of women in Oyo State politics.

Data Analysis Results

The study yielded a combination of quantitative and qualitative findings that shed light on the complexities of women's political participation in Oyo State.

Quantitative Findings

The questionnaire distribution and collection process resulted in a strong response rate, enhancing the reliability and generalizability of the quantitative results. Out of 385 questionnaires distributed, 324 were successfully retrieved and completed, representing an 84.2% response rate. This high response rate indicates a significant level of engagement with the study among the participants. The demographic analysis of the respondents revealed a diverse group of women from various socioeconomic backgrounds within Oyo State. The occupational distribution of the respondents was as follows: traders constituted 26.5% of the respondents, professionals (such as teachers, lawyers and healthcare workers) accounted for 20.1%, civil servants made up 22.2%, employees in the private sector represented 15.7% and farmers comprised 9.3%. This diversity in occupations helps to ensure that the study captured a broad range of experiences and perspectives of women across different sectors of society in Oyo State.

The quantitative analysis provided statistical evidence for the numerous challenges faced by women in Oyo State politics. A substantial majority of respondents identified gender inequality and discrimination as a pervasive problem (89.5%). Societal stereotypes and cultural norms that reinforce traditional gender roles and limit women's public participation were also highlighted as significant obstacles by 91.3% of respondents. Additionally, a large proportion of respondents (88.1%) cited the lack of education, finance and resources as hindering women's political engagement. Concerns about safety and security were also prominent, with 84.7% of respondents reporting political violence and intimidation as a challenge and 76.8% indicating that sexual harassment and violence were significant obstacles.

Furthermore, the quantitative analysis examined the awareness and perceived effectiveness of policies aimed at promoting women's political participation. The results revealed that awareness of affirmative action policies, designed to increase women's representation, was relatively low. Only 44.1% of the respondents reported being aware of such policies. Moreover, when respondents were asked to assess the effectiveness of these policies, a significant proportion expressed skepticism. 30.0% rated the policies as "neutral," indicating that they neither helped nor hindered women's participation, while 33.0% perceived the policies as "ineffective" or "very ineffective," suggesting that they were not achieving their intended goals.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data, gathered through in-depth interviews, provided rich contextual details and personal narratives that complemented the quantitative findings.

Barriers to Women's Political Participation

The interviews consistently highlighted several key barriers that impede women's political participation in Oyo State. Financial constraints emerged as a significant obstacle, with many women lacking the resources to fund campaigns and compete effectively in the political arena. As one participant noted, *"Politics is very expensive here. You need money to print posters, to travel, to organize meetings. Many women just can't afford it"*. (Respondent 1, 2025)

Political violence and intimidation were also frequently cited as major deterrents. Women expressed concerns about their safety and security, as well as the safety of their families, when engaging in politics. A participant shared, *"The violence is scary. You hear stories of women being attacked, harassed. It makes you think twice about getting involved."* (Respondent 3, 2025)

Lack of support from political parties was another recurring theme. Women reported feeling marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes within parties and

they often struggled to secure nominations for political office. One interviewee stated, *"The men in the party don't take us seriously. They give us the token positions, but they don't really want us to succeed."* (Respondent 3, 2025)

The interviews also emphasized the persistent influence of cultural and societal norms that reinforce traditional gender roles and limit women's public participation. Participants described facing societal expectations that prioritize domestic responsibilities over political engagement. A participant explained, *"People expect women to stay at home, to take care of the family. They don't think we should be involved in politics."* (Respondent 4, 2025)

Finally, media bias was identified as a challenge, with women often receiving less coverage and being portrayed in stereotypical ways. A participant commented, *"The media focuses on our appearance, not on our policies. It's frustrating."* (Respondent 2, 2025)

The qualitative data also underscored the pervasive nature of patriarchal structures and gender-based discrimination within the political system. Participants described encountering systemic biases that disadvantage women and perpetuate male dominance.

Cultural Norms and Gender-Based Discrimination:

The interviews provided detailed accounts of how cultural norms and societal expectations shape women's experiences in Oyo State politics. Traditional gender roles were consistently identified as a barrier, with women facing societal pressure to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers over their political aspirations. Participants described encountering resistance from family members, community leaders and the broader society when they sought to enter the political arena. One participant shared, *"My own family was against it at first. They said politics is not for women, that I should focus on my home."* (Respondent 4, 2025)

The interviews also revealed the prevalence of societal stigma associated with women's involvement in politics. Women who challenge traditional gender roles may face criticism, ostracization and even harassment. A participant explained, *"People talk about you. They say you're too ambitious, that you're not a good woman if you're in politics."* (Respondent 7, 2025)

Policies and Legal Frameworks:

The qualitative data highlighted concerns about the effectiveness of existing policies and legal frameworks designed to promote women's political participation. Participants consistently pointed to weak enforcement and limited awareness of policies such as the National Gender Policy and the 35% Affirmative Action for Women. They emphasized

the need for stronger institutional mechanisms and grassroots initiatives to ensure that these policies are effectively implemented and that women are empowered to exercise their political rights. One participant stated, *"We have the laws, but they're not enforced. We need to hold people accountable."* (Respondent 6, 2025)

The interviews also underscored the importance of raising awareness about women's rights and promoting gender equality at all levels of society. Participants emphasized the need for educational programs, community outreach initiatives and advocacy campaigns to challenge discriminatory norms and empower women to participate fully in the political process.

Findings

The study revealed several key findings regarding women's political participation in Oyo State. Gender inequality and discrimination, societal stereotypes and cultural norms, sexual harassment and violence, political violence and intimidation and lack of education, finance and resources were identified as significant challenges faced by women in Oyo State politics. Specifically, the weak enforcement of gender quota laws, financial difficulties and biased media representation were highlighted as key obstacles. The analysis of quantitative data showed women's disproportionately low number of leadership positions within political parties in Oyo State. While higher levels of education correlated with increased political participation among women, education alone did not guarantee participation due to fears of political violence and intimidation. Awareness of affirmative action policies, such as the 35% Affirmative Action for Women, was relatively low and their effectiveness was questioned due to weak enforcement. Despite these challenges, qualitative interviews revealed that many women are interested in politics but are discouraged by financial constraints, societal pressures and safety concerns.

Conclusion

The study concluded that gender disparities in political representation persist in Oyo State, with women facing systemic barriers that hinder their full participation and reinforce male dominance. These barriers include institutional biases, financial constraints, cultural perceptions and social norms.

Recommendations

To enhance women's political participation in Oyo State, the study recommended several strategies:

- i. Strengthening policy implementation by enforcing legal frameworks that mandate political parties to allocate a specific percentage of leadership positions to women.

- ii. Implementing stricter laws and policies to protect women from harassment and intimidation in politics, along with harsher penalties for perpetrators of violence.
- iii. Introducing specialized leadership training, political workshops and mentorship programs for women to equip them with the necessary skills and confidence.
- iv. Increasing government and public support for women's political initiatives through state-funded programs aimed at promoting gender equality in political representation.
- v. Expanding mentorship and leadership training programs to provide aspiring female politicians with necessary skills and knowledge and establishing networks connecting experienced female leaders with emerging politicians.

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Respondent 1, Fieldwork, January 2025

Respondent 2, Fieldwork, January 2025

Respondent 3, Fieldwork, January 2025

Respondent 4, Fieldwork, January 2025

Respondent 5, Fieldwork, January 2025

Respondent 6, Fieldwork, January 2025

Respondent 7, Fieldwork, January 2025

Respondent 8, Fieldwork, January 2025