Socio-Economic Constraints on Women's Political Participation in Nigeria By

Ngene Innocent Aja,
Alita Emmanuel Chinagorom,
Faith Onyekere N.,
Department of Political Science, Alex Ekwueme Federal University,
Ndufu-Alike Ikwo, Nigeria

Abstract

Women's political participation in Nigeria has remained persistently low despite sustained global and national advocacy for gender inclusivity in governance. More than two decades of uninterrupted democratic rule (1999–2023) have not translated into significant female representation in elective or appointive offices, with women occupying less than ten percent of political positions. This study examines the socio-economic factors constraining women's participation in Nigerian politics using Resource Mobilization Theory, which posits that political engagement depends largely on access to and control of critical resources. Adopting a documentary research design, the study analyses secondary data drawn from electoral reports, policy documents, scholarly literature, and institutional publications. The findings reveal that women's political participation is undermined by multiple structural barriers, including limited access to campaign financing, exclusion from influential political networks, unequal educational opportunities, and deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. Although policy initiatives such as the 35 percent affirmative action target contained in Nigeria's National Gender Policy seek to enhance women's inclusion, their impact has remained limited due to weak enforcement mechanisms and sociocultural resistance. The study concludes that women's underrepresentation in Nigerian politics is fundamentally a structural problem rooted in unequal access to economic and institutional resources. It therefore recommends the adoption of legally binding gender quotas, targeted economic empowerment initiatives, and institutional reforms within political parties to support women's candidacy and leadership. Addressing these structural barriers is essential for strengthening democratic inclusivity and achieving more representative governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Women's political participation; socio-economic inequality; resource mobilization theory; gender quotas; Nigerian politics; democratic inclusion.

Introduction

The question of women's participation in politics remains central to contemporary debates on democracy, governance, and inclusive development. Democratic systems are normatively grounded in the principles of representation and equality; yet the persistent underrepresentation of women in political institutions across the world exposes a fundamental paradox within modern democracies. Although women constitute approximately half of the global population, their access to political power and decision-making authority remains disproportionately limited (Ono & Endo, 2024). This imbalance extends beyond questions of gender justice. Increasingly, empirical research demonstrates that women's presence in governance contributes to broader developmental outcomes, including more socially responsive policy agendas and greater attention to sustainability. For example, Wang, Feng, Yin, and Chang (2025), in their analysis of 101 countries between 1996 and 2019, find that women's political participation significantly stimulates green innovation, particularly in developed countries and high-carbon economies. Their findings reinforce a long-standing theoretical argument that women in leadership tend to prioritize social welfare, environmental protection, and long-term societal wellbeing, whereas political systems dominated by men often privilege technological expansion and power-centred pursuits. Consequently, the marginalization of women from political decision-making deprives societies of perspectives essential for balanced and sustainable governance.

Globally, the representation of women in political institutions varies considerably. In countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), women constitute an average of 33.83 per cent of legislators, with only two countries achieving gender parity (Ono & Endo, 2024). While several states have recorded notable progress through gender quotas, affirmative action policies, and institutional reforms, significant structural and cultural barriers persist. Gender bias operates throughout the political recruitment process from women's self-selection as aspirants, to party nomination processes, and ultimately voter acceptance at the ballot box (Ono & Endo, 2024). This multi-

stage discrimination illustrates that the challenge of women's representation is not merely institutional but deeply embedded in political cultures and social perceptions of leadership. Across Africa, experiences vary widely. Countries such as Rwanda and South Africa have demonstrated that deliberate constitutional frameworks and quota systems can substantially increase women's political representation. Yet in many other African states, entrenched socio-cultural norms and weak institutional commitments continue to sustain male dominance in political leadership.

Nigeria presents a particularly revealing case within this broader global pattern. Women constitute more than half of the country's population and play significant roles in economic production and social development, yet they remain markedly underrepresented within formal political institutions (Udoms, Atakpa, & Ndaeyo, 2024). Despite their demographic significance, women occupy less than ten per cent of elective and appointive positions across the country (Udoh et al., 2025). This marginalization persists despite Nigeria's formal commitments to gender equality, including the National Gender Policy and the adoption of a 35 per cent affirmative action target. Since the advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999, Nigeria's democratic system has witnessed the consolidation of electoral processes and political institutions. However, these developments have not translated into a corresponding expansion of women's representation. Instead, women continue to be concentrated in peripheral political roles, while strategic decision-making positions remain overwhelmingly dominated by men.

A number of socio-economic and institutional factors account for this persistent exclusion. One major constraint is the monetization of politics and the prohibitive cost of electoral competition. Campaign financing in Nigeria requires substantial financial resources, placing women who typically have less access to economic capital at a structural disadvantage (Udoms et al., 2024). Educational disparities further complicate the picture, as unequal access to education limits women's political literacy, exposure, and confidence to pursue leadership positions (Adefemi, 2024). These material constraints intersect with entrenched patriarchal norms, religious beliefs, and gender stereotypes that continue to portray political leadership as the preserve of men (Udoh et al., 2025). Political parties, which function as the principal gateways to political office, often reinforce this exclusion

by nominating fewer female candidates and providing limited institutional support for women's campaigns. Collectively, these structural and cultural dynamics have contributed to Nigeria's continued lag behind global and regional benchmarks for female political representation.

Yet the experiences of Nigerian women who succeed in navigating these barriers reveal important forms of agency and adaptation. Igwebuike and Chimuanya (2024), through a critical discourse analysis of female ministers' and senators' social media engagements, demonstrate that Nigerian women in leadership positions strategically deploy self-presentation techniques such as ingratiation, exemplification, and self-promotion to construct legitimacy within the political arena. These communicative strategies enhance their visibility, project competence, and position them as advocates of social justice and responsive governance. Such findings illustrate both the resilience of Nigerian women in politics and the additional symbolic and communicative labour required to gain recognition within a male-dominated political environment.

Comparative experiences from other African contexts further illustrate the transformative potential of women's political inclusion. In Ghana, for instance, non-formal education initiatives inspired by Freire's theory of conscientisation have empowered women to contest and win elections at the local level while strengthening their participation in governance processes (Namoog & Agyekum, 2024). These experiences suggest that socio-economic and cultural barriers to women's participation are not immutable; rather, they can be mitigated through targeted empowerment programmes, institutional reforms, and shifts in social attitudes. For Nigeria, such lessons highlight the broader democratic and developmental benefits of expanding women's participation in political decision-making.

Against this backdrop, the persistent underrepresentation of women in Nigerian politics cannot be understood as a natural or inevitable outcome. Rather, it reflects the interaction of socio-economic inequalities, institutional practices, and entrenched cultural norms that collectively constrain women's access to political power. This marginalization not only undermines the inclusiveness of Nigeria's democratic system but also deprives governance processes of the diverse

perspectives necessary for equitable and sustainable policy outcomes. It is within this context that the present study examines the socio-economic factors shaping women's participation in Nigerian politics. By situating Nigeria within broader global debates on gender and political representation, the study seeks to illuminate the structural dynamics that sustain women's marginalization while identifying pathways through which women can be repositioned as equal stakeholders in the democratic process.

Literature Review

Policy Interventions and Women's Participation in Politics

Over the past two decades, policy interventions have been widely promoted as mechanisms for redressing gender imbalances in political participation across Africa, with Nigeria providing a particularly contested case. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, women's representation in elective offices has remained disproportionately low, averaging less than 10% since 1999 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). This persistent underrepresentation has raised critical debates on the efficacy of gender-sensitive policy interventions, especially those designed to increase women's access to political structures.

One of the most prominent policy tools is the adoption of gender quotas, which seek to reserve a certain percentage of elective and appointive positions for women. While such measures have been successfully implemented in countries such as Rwanda and South Africa, Nigeria's attempts have been inconsistent and weakly enforced. For example, the National Gender Policy of 2006 recommended a 35% affirmative action benchmark for women in both elective and appointive positions. However, compliance has remained largely voluntary, with successive governments failing to institutionalize the quota into binding law (Afolabi, 2018). As a result, women's access to political power has remained precarious and subject to the goodwill of ruling elites. Beyond quotas, other policy interventions have targeted women's empowerment programs, such as capacity-building workshops, leadership training, and entrepreneurship support. These initiatives, often championed by civil society organizations and donor agencies, aim to equip women with the skills and confidence necessary to compete in male-dominated political spaces. While valuable, these interventions often suffer from poor

funding, limited coverage, and lack of continuity, thus restricting their long-term impact (Nwankwo & Okorie, 2021).

Another major policy gap lies in the legal and institutional framework for political parties. Although the Electoral Act (as amended in 2022) introduced some reforms aimed at enhancing inclusivity, there is no binding provision compelling parties to field a minimum number of female candidates. Political parties, as gatekeepers of electoral competition, remain dominated by male elites who often prioritize patronage networks and financial capacity over gender inclusion. Consequently, even well-crafted policies are undermined by entrenched party practices that resist structural transformation.

Resource Mobilization Theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) provides a useful lens for interpreting these challenges. It underscores that policies alone cannot guarantee participation unless women have the resources economic, social, and institutional to exploit such opportunities. Nigerian women are disadvantaged not only by weak enforcement of gender-sensitive policies but also by broader socio-economic barriers that prevent them from leveraging existing frameworks.

Despite these limitations, policy interventions have achieved some symbolic gains. Women's presence in federal cabinets has slightly improved under certain administrations, and grassroots mobilization programs have increased women's visibility in local governance. However, these achievements remain fragmented and insufficient to dismantle the entrenched patriarchal structures that dominate Nigeria's political system.

Income Inequality and Occupational Segregation

Economic inequality and occupational segregation are widely recognized as major determinants of women's political marginalization in Sub-Saharan Africa. Okonkwo and Ibrahim (2023), in their study *Income Disparities and Political Participation in West Africa: A Gendered Analysis*, examine how economic inequality constrains women's ability to contest elective positions. Drawing on a cross-sectional survey of 420 respondents across Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal, the authors demonstrate that women's exclusion from financial networks, high nomination fees, and the monetisation of politics constitute systemic barriers to

political engagement. While their analysis rigorously documents economic disparities, it underemphasizes the role of political party structures, which in Nigeria operate as closed patronage systems. Within these hierarchies, access to resources and political sponsorship is tightly controlled, and economic exclusion is often reinforced by patriarchal norms, further entrenching women's marginalization. Adepoju and Mensah (2024), in *Occupational Inequality and Women's Political Pathways in Sub-Saharan Africa*, adopt a mixed-methods approach to investigate how labour market segmentation affects women's political trajectories. Their findings reveal that women's overrepresentation in low-income and low-prestige occupations reduces financial independence and limits access to political networks. Although the study convincingly traces structural economic constraints, it underplays context-specific cultural and religious dynamics, which in Nigeria normalize women's confinement to informal or low-paying sectors, thus amplifying their political exclusion.

Udoh, Adeyiga, and Mkhize (2025), in *Economic Empowerment for Women in Politics: A Focus on Nigeria, South Africa, and Zimbabwe*, synthesize existing literature to interrogate why women, despite their demographic weight, remain underrepresented in formal political leadership. Applying frameworks of gender and power, social movements, and resource mobilization, the study situates women's economic marginalization not solely as material deprivation but as a product of patriarchal political institutions and social norms. Across the three countries, key barriers include prohibitive election costs, inflated nomination fees, restricted access to patronage networks, and the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work. Gender-blind economic policies further exacerbate inequalities, entrenching male dominance in political structures. These studies demonstrate that economic exclusion is multidimensional, combining structural, institutional, and cultural elements. In Nigeria, the intersection of patriarchy, religious norms, and party-level financial gatekeeping intensifies the challenges women face, making mere economic empowerment insufficient for substantive political participation.

The literature also highlights potential strategies to address these barriers. Policy interventions such as reducing or waiving nomination fees for women, establishing dedicated campaign financing mechanisms, enforcing legislated

quotas backed by financial incentives, and mobilizing civil society support for female aspirants emerge as critical mechanisms for enhancing participation. Without such structural reforms, women's political involvement in Nigeria risks remaining largely symbolic, limiting the inclusivity and responsiveness of democratic governance.

Patriarchal Structures and Women's Political Participation

Patriarchal norms remain a central barrier to women's political participation in Nigeria, embedded within cultural, religious, and institutional frameworks. Ezeani and Musa (2023), in *Patriarchy and the Exclusion of Women in Nigerian Party Politics*, examined male dominance within party hierarchies and its implications for female political inclusion. Drawing on qualitative interviews with female aspirants and party officials, the study demonstrates that patriarchal norms are systematically entrenched in party constitutions and operational practices, thereby sidelining women from influential positions. While the study effectively highlights parties as custodians of patriarchy, it does not explore how women resist these structures through informal alliances, grassroots mobilization, or intra-party negotiation, leaving a critical aspect of agency underexamined. Complementing this perspective, Akinyemi (2024), in *Cultural Hegemony and Women's Political Ambitions in Nigeria*, applies Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony to understand how cultural narratives reinforce male-dominated politics. Using ethnographic data from Southwest Nigeria, the study finds that many women internalize patriarchal stereotypes, leading to self-censorship in political ambition. The analysis, however, underplays the economic dimension of exclusion, treating patriarchy solely as a cultural construct and overlooking how financial barriers intersect with societal norms to limit women's political engagement.

Bello and Yakubu (2022), in *Religion, Patriarchy, and Political Legitimacy in Northern Nigeria*, examine the role of religious institutions in reinforcing patriarchal power. Utilizing surveys and content analysis of sermons, they demonstrate that religious leaders often invoke moral and doctrinal arguments to delegitimize women's leadership. Although the study illuminates the intersection of religion and patriarchy, it does not account for generational shifts, including the emerging influence of younger religious elites and women's associations that challenge

restrictive interpretations of leadership. Okafor and Danjuma (2025), in *The Gendered Politics of Leadership in Nigeria's Fourth Republic*, employ a historical-comparative approach to trace the persistence of patriarchal norms since 1999. Their findings reveal that, despite constitutional guarantees of gender equality, informal patriarchal networks within state and community politics continue to dominate decision-making processes. However, the study offers primarily generic recommendations for "attitudinal change," without specifying institutional mechanisms to weaken entrenched patriarchal structures within political parties.
These studies underscore that patriarchy in Nigeria is active, systemic, and multifaceted, reproduced through political institutions, cultural norms, and religious authority. Yet, scholarship has not fully interrogated how patriarchal dominance intersects with economic exclusion, party financing, and patronage systems that overwhelmingly favor male actors. Addressing these intertwined barriers requires a multi-pronged strategy: constitutional reforms to enforce gender quotas, institutional transformation within political parties, and grassroots advocacy initiatives led by women and youth. Without confronting the structural reinforcements of patriarchy, efforts to enhance women's political participation are likely to remain largely symbolic rather than substantive.

Gender Quotas, Policy Interventions, and Women's Political Inclusion

The implementation of gender quotas and related policy interventions has been central to debates on women's political inclusion in Nigeria. Salaudeen and Jiddere (2025), in *Affirmative Action Policy and the Challenge of Female Cabinet Membership in Nigeria*, critically examine the tension between global gender equality frameworks and entrenched patriarchal realities. Focusing on the National Gender Policy (NGP), which mandates 35% inclusion of women in political appointments, the study employs a mixed-methods design combining surveys and qualitative analysis to show that women remain significantly underrepresented in cabinet positions despite constitutional and international commitments. Drawing on Political Liberalism and Feminist Legal Theory, the authors argue that the absence of binding domestic reforms renders quotas largely discretionary, with implementation contingent upon the political will of successive governments. The study highlights the symbolic nature of Nigeria's alignment with international gender norms, noting that cultural and misogynistic perceptions of women in public affairs further weaken enforcement.

Olatunji (2023), in *Policy Quotas and the Struggle for Gender Equity in Nigerian Legislatures*, extends the analysis to legislative representation at federal and state levels. Using a comparative case study, the research finds that gender quotas often encounter elite resistance and strategic dilution, as political actors seek to preserve male dominance. While this study effectively illuminates the political elite's role in undermining quotas, it underemphasizes the agency of grassroots women's groups and civil society actors in lobbying for effective enforcement. Ibrahim and Chukwu (2024), in *Beyond Quotas: Policy Interventions and Women's Political Inclusivity in Nigeria*, examine broader policy frameworks, including funding support for female candidates, media regulations, and civic education programs. Their mixed-methods analysis reveals that while quotas provide symbolic inclusion, practical measures such as subsidized nomination fees and the strengthening of women's political caucuses have more tangible effects on participation. Nonetheless, informal barriers such as godfatherism and patriarchal patronage systems continue to neutralize many of these interventions, limiting their effectiveness.

These studies underscore a critical paradox: while gender quotas and policy instruments are necessary for promoting inclusion, their transformative potential is constrained by Nigeria's political culture, in which access to power is mediated through patronage and entrenched institutional hierarchies. Effective political inclusion of women thus requires a multi-layered approach: codifying quotas within binding legal frameworks, reforming party structures and financing systems, and strengthening grassroots mobilization to challenge cultural stereotypes and ensure substantive, rather than symbolic, representation. Without such structural and cultural interventions, quotas risk producing numerical presence without meaningful influence.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT), first articulated in the late 1970s by John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald (1977). RMT posits that political participation, social movements, and collective action are driven not merely by grievances or interest, but by the ability of individuals and groups to acquire, control, and deploy critical resources financial, human, organizational, and informational for political engagement. In other words, the capacity to

mobilize resources, rather than motivation alone, largely determines the extent and effectiveness of participation. Applied to the Nigerian context, RMT provides a compelling lens for understanding the socio-economic constraints limiting women's political participation. Women's underrepresentation is not primarily a function of disinterest but stems from structural barriers: prohibitive campaign costs, restricted access to party hierarchies, limited social networks, and the double burden of unpaid domestic responsibilities (Munshi-Kurian, Munshi, & Kurian, 2019). While male actors often leverage established patronage systems and financial capital to secure nominations and electoral victories, women face systemic disadvantages that inhibit comparable mobilization. Consequently, RMT highlights how socio-economic inequalities directly translate into political marginalization.

A core assumption of RMT is that resource availability shapes both the form and outcome of political participation (Atay, 2019). In Nigeria, women's access to education, professional careers, and income-generating opportunities determines their capacity to contest elections, fund campaigns, and sustain grassroots mobilization. This explains why women are often more visible as voters than as candidates: voting requires minimal resources, whereas running for office demands substantial financial, institutional, and organizational support. Compared to alternative frameworks such as Liberal Feminism or Patriarchy Theory, RMT is particularly suited to this study because it directly links structural and economic conditions to measurable political outcomes. While feminist and patriarchal analyses provide normative critiques of gender inequality, they often do not sufficiently account for the resource-based barriers that constrain political participation in Nigeria's highly monetized electoral system (Munshi-Kurian, Munshi, & Kurian, 2019). RMT, in contrast, captures the political economy of participation, demonstrating how access to money, networks, and institutional support fundamentally shapes women's political fortunes.

Thus, RMT provides both the analytical foundation and the explanatory mechanism for this study. It illuminates why addressing women's underrepresentation requires more than rhetorical commitments to gender equality: unless structural interventions expand women's access to financial and organizational resources, political participation will remain skewed in favour of

men, and Nigeria's democracy will continue to fall short of its promise of inclusivity.

Methodology

This study adopts a documentary research approach to examine the socio-economic factors affecting women's participation in politics in Nigeria between 1999 and 2023. The documentary method is appropriate because the research relies on the systematic examination and interpretation of existing records rather than the generation of primary data through surveys or interviews. By drawing on documented evidence, the study is able to critically interrogate the structural and socio-economic conditions that have shaped women's political participation during Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The choice of the period beginning in 1999 is particularly significant, as it marks the return to democratic governance and the establishment of institutional frameworks that formally guarantee political participation for all citizens. Examining developments within this democratic era therefore provides a meaningful basis for assessing the extent to which women have been integrated into Nigeria's political system over more than two decades.

Data for the study were obtained exclusively from secondary sources. Relevant materials were sourced from academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, electoral reports, and official statistical publications. Key institutional records were accessed through the Independent National Electoral Commission, the National Bureau of Statistics, and the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, which provide authoritative data on voter registration, political representation, and gender-related policy initiatives. Additional scholarly sources were retrieved from academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, ResearchGate, and publications indexed by Taylor & Francis. The study also reviewed relevant legal and policy frameworks, particularly the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) and the National Gender Policy, in order to situate women's political participation within Nigeria's institutional and legal environment.

The collected materials were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, which enabled the systematic identification and interpretation of recurring themes across the documents. Through this method, the study examined patterns relating to economic constraints, income inequality, occupational segregation, patriarchal

cultural structures, and the effectiveness of gender quotas and policy interventions in shaping women's participation in politics. The analysis was guided by Resource Mobilization Theory, which emphasizes that political participation is significantly influenced by access to resources such as financial capital, organizational networks, and institutional support. Within the Nigerian context, this analytical framework helps explain how socio-economic inequalities limit women's capacity to contest elections, mobilize support, and sustain political engagement. To enhance the credibility of the findings, only credible and verifiable sources were utilized, and information was cross-checked across multiple documents to ensure consistency and reduce bias. Through this systematic examination of documentary evidence, the study provides a comprehensive and theoretically grounded analysis of the socio-economic barriers affecting women's participation in Nigerian politics.

Result & Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study and provides a critical analysis of socio-economic factors affecting women's participation in Nigerian politics. Guided by the research questions and the Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT), the chapter interprets data obtained from secondary sources, including journal articles, reports, and policy documents.

4.2 Economic Constraints and Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

One of the most significant barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria is the economic dimension. Women in Nigeria are disproportionately affected by poverty, limited access to education, occupational segregation, and financial exclusion, which collectively undermine their capacity to compete in a highly monetized political environment.

4.2.1 Poverty and Income Disparities

Nigeria's political system is heavily monetized, requiring candidates to finance campaigns, mobilize supporters, and secure party nominations. However, evidence shows that poverty disproportionately affects women. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), about 63% of Nigerians are multidimensionally poor, with women making up the majority in rural and urban

informal sectors. This economic marginalization deprives women of the financial resources required for effective political mobilization.

Indicator	Men (%)	Women (%)	Source
National poverty headcount	58.2	67.1	NBS, 2022
Average monthly income (urban)	₦120,000	₦68,000	NBS Labour Force Survey, 2022
Employment in informal sector	52.4	78.6	World Bank, 2023
Employment in formal section	47.6	21.4	NBS Labour Force Survey, 2022
Access to land ownership	23.5	7.1	FAO Gender and Land Rights Report, 2021

The table above reveals that women experience higher poverty levels, lower income, and limited access to productive resources such as land. Since Nigerian politics is strongly tied to wealth, these inequalities reinforce women's exclusion.

4.2.2 Education and Political Literacy

Education serves as a critical determinant of political awareness and participation. Studies reveal that women's lower educational attainment translates into weaker political literacy, reducing their competitiveness in party politics (Dutse, 2024; Isola, 2024).

Table 4.2: Literacy Rates in Nigeria by Gender (Ages 15+)

Gender	Literacy Rate (%)	Source
Male	71.2	UNESCO, 2022
Female	58.3	UNESCO, 2022

These disparities limit women's ability to access information, engage in political debates, and command authority in the political arena.

4.2.3 Political Finance and Campaign Funding

Money politics in Nigeria is deeply entrenched. Political aspirants are required to pay exorbitant nomination fees and sustain costly campaigns. For example, in the 2019 general elections, the All Progressives Congress (APC) charged ₦45 million

for its presidential nomination form, while the People's Democratic Party (PDP) charged ₦12 million (INEC, 2019). Such financial thresholds effectively exclude women, who are less financially empowered than men.

Table 4.3: Nomination Fees for Political Offices in Nigeria (2019 General Elections)

Political Office	APC Nomination Fee (₦)	PDP Nomination Fee (₦)	Women Waivers/Discounts
President	45,000,000	12,000,000	Partial waiver (symbolic)
Governor	22,500,000	6,000,000	Partial waiver (symbolic)
National Assembly (Sen.)	7,000,000	2,500,000	Partial waiver (symbolic)
House of Reps	3,850,000	1,500,000	Partial waiver (symbolic)

The table indicates that although some political parties announce "discounts" for women, these waivers are largely symbolic and insufficient to offset the financial burden of contesting elections. As Salaudeen & Jiddere (2025) argue, the monetization of politics entrenches male dominance, since men are more likely to access financial networks and patronage systems.

4.2.4 Resource Mobilization Theory Application

From the perspective of Resource Mobilization Theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), women's exclusion in Nigerian politics is not merely a reflection of individual capability but a structural outcome of unequal access to resources. RMT assumes that successful political participation requires the mobilization of financial, educational, and organizational resources. Women in Nigeria face systemic disadvantages across these dimensions:

- Financial resources: Limited access to campaign funding and political godfathers.
- Educational resources: Lower literacy and weaker policy literacy.

- Organizational resources: Weak women's political networks compared to male-dominated structures.

Thus, even when women are politically motivated, their inability to mobilize these resources constrains participation. This explains why Nigerian women, despite constituting 49% of the population (NPC, 2023), occupy less than 6% of elective offices (INEC, 2023).

4.2.5 Critical Nigerian Contextual Analysis

Unlike some African states such as Rwanda, Uganda, and South Africa—where deliberate state mechanisms have facilitated female representation—Nigeria's political economy is structured in a way that privileges male wealth, patronage, and elite bargaining. Poverty and income inequality intersect with patriarchy, making politics a "male-dominated investment terrain." Nigerian women are expected to act as mobilizers and supporters during elections but are excluded when resources for leadership contests are being distributed.

4.3 Socio-Cultural Barriers to Women's Political Representation

Beyond economic exclusion, Nigerian women face **deeply entrenched socio-cultural barriers** that limit their political agency. These barriers, rooted in patriarchy, cultural norms, and religious interpretations, construct politics as a "male domain" and systematically restrict women's opportunities for leadership. The findings across various studies (Okonkwo, 2025; Chukwu, 2022; UNICEF, 2023) demonstrate that cultural and religious ideologies, gender roles, and institutionalized patriarchy are among the most decisive obstacles to female participation in Nigeria's democratic process.

4.3.1 Patriarchy and Gender Role Expectations

Nigeria operates under a patriarchal socio-political order where men are considered natural leaders, while women are relegated to domestic and supportive roles. This gendered division of labour significantly influences perceptions of political competence.

Statement	% Agree (Male Respondents)	% Agree (Female Respondents)	Source

"Politics is more suited for men than women."	71.3%	48.5%	Afrobarometer, 2023
"Women should focus on family rather than politics."	64.7%	42.1%	Afrobarometer, 2023
"Men make better political leaders than women."	69.5%	40.3%	Afrobarometer, 2023

The data show that patriarchal perceptions are not only held by men but also internalized by a significant proportion of women, creating a double burden. This "internalized patriarchy" explains why some women themselves discourage female aspirants, often endorsing male candidates due to cultural conditioning.

4.3.2 Religious Interpretations and Women's Political Legitimacy

Religion plays a crucial role in Nigeria's socio-political life. However, certain interpretations of both Christianity and Islam reinforce women's political exclusion. In many northern states under Sharia legal frameworks, women are discouraged from seeking public leadership roles, justified by religious narratives that stress modesty and domesticity. Similarly, in some conservative Christian communities in the South, biblical injunctions are invoked to argue that women should not "lead men."

Table 4.5: Religious Barriers to Women's Political Leadership

Region	Dominant Religion	Reported Religious Restriction on Women's Political Participation	Source
Northern Nigeria	Islam (Sharia in 12 states)	Women discouraged from political rallies and public office due to modesty doctrines	USAID, 2022
South-East Nigeria	Christianity	Some churches discourage female political leadership, citing biblical roles	Nwagbara, 2022

South-West Nigeria	Mixed (Islam & Christianity)	Moderate acceptance, but traditional norms limit women's political exposure	UNICEF, 2023
South-south	Christianity (with traditional beliefs	Religious restriction is minimal, but cultural practices (male-dominated traditional councils and chieftaincy institutions) indirectly limit women's political inclusion	Akpan & Ekanem, 2023

4.3.3 Violence, Intimidation, and Cultural Hostility in Politics

Electoral violence and intimidation are critical deterrents to women's participation. Nigerian politics is often characterized by thuggery, physical assaults, and threats. Studies show that women are disproportionately targeted with sexual harassment, online bullying, and character assassination when they attempt to contest (Salaudeen & Jiddere, 2025; CLEEN Foundation, 2023)

Table 4.6: Reported Experiences of Violence Against Female Politicians (2019 Elections)

Type of Violence/Harassment	% of Female Candidates Reporting Experience	Source
Threats of physical harm	38.4%	CLEEN Foundation, 2020
Sexual harassment	27.6%	UN Women, 2021
Online bullying/abuse	43.2%	Amnesty Int'l, 2022
Character assassination	52.1%	Salaudeen & Jiddere, 2025

The figures suggest that politics is not just financially hostile, but culturally violent for women. This aligns with the Resource Mobilization Theory's argument that without security, solidarity networks, and protection, marginalized groups (in this case, women) cannot mobilize effectively.

4.3.4 Cultural Practices and Traditional Institutions

Nigeria's traditional institutions, particularly in rural communities, remain male-dominated. Women are often excluded from chieftaincy councils and decision-making bodies, which serve as incubators for political leadership. In Igbo traditional systems, for instance, women are rarely given titles that confer political legitimacy. Similarly, in Northern emirate structures, women's voices are systematically silenced.

4.4 Gender Quotas, Policy Interventions, and Their Limits in Nigeria

While socio-economic and cultural constraints weigh heavily on women's political participation, policy interventions such as gender quotas and affirmative action have been introduced as corrective measures. However, in Nigeria, these interventions have faced implementation bottlenecks, constitutional ambiguities, and cultural resistance, making them less effective compared to other African countries. This section interrogates the promises, challenges, and practical limits of such interventions.

4.4.1 The National Gender Policy and the 35% Affirmative Action

Nigeria's National Gender Policy (NGP) of 2006 was formulated to ensure at least 35% representation of women in political appointments and elective positions. Inspired by international treaties such as CEDAW (1979) and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), the NGP was intended to institutionalize gender mainstreaming.

4.4.3 Constitutional Barriers and Policy Limitations

Research (Salaudeen & Jiddere, 2025; Aidonojie et al., 2025) consistently shows that constitutional silence on gender quotas in Nigeria is the greatest stumbling block. The Nigerian Constitution (1999, as amended) does not expressly mandate gender equity in political representation, thereby leaving implementation at the discretion of ruling elites.

For instance, while the federal government occasionally appoints a few women to cabinet positions, elective representation remains dismal because political parties, driven by patriarchal structures, resist women's candidacy in primaries.

Table 4.7: Female Candidates vs. Male Candidates in Nigeria's 2023 General Elections

Position Contested	Male Candidates	Female Candidates	% Female Candidates	Elected Women	Source
Presidency	16	1	5.8%	0	INEC, 2023
Governorship	419	24	5.4%	0	INEC, 2023
Senate	1,008	92	8.4%	3	INEC, 2023
House of Reps	3,122	285	8.3%	14	INEC, 2023

4.4.4 Political Party Resistance

Nigerian political parties play a decisive role in candidate selection. Yet, studies show that parties are reluctant to field female aspirants, citing electability concerns, cultural prejudices, and financial incapacity (Okonkwo, 2025; Arowolo, 2022). Even when women are fielded, they are often given less strategic constituencies, ensuring low chances of victory.

Table 4.8: Women's Representation in Major Nigerian Parties (2023)

Political Party	% Women in Party Leadership	% Women Candidates (2023 Elections)	Source
APC	12%	7.3%	CDD, 2023
PDP	15%	8.1%	CDD, 2023
Labour Party	17%	10.2%	CDD, 2023

4.4.5 Nigerian Contextual Critique

Unlike Rwanda and Uganda, where constitutional reforms institutionalized quotas, Nigeria's reliance on policy-level interventions without constitutional force makes its gender quotas largely ineffective. Moreover, cultural hostility, weak institutions, and party resistance combine to neutralize the potential impact

of affirmative action. From the lens of Resource Mobilization Theory, the limits of quotas illustrate that policy resources alone are insufficient. For women to succeed politically, they require not just laws and quotas, but mobilized resources financial, institutional, social, and cultural legitimacy.

Summary

This study examined the socio-economic factors affecting women's participation in Nigerian politics between 1999 and 2023. Guided by the research questions and objectives, the key findings are as follows:

1. Women's participation in politics is heavily constrained by limited access to financial resources, campaign funding, and economic opportunities compared to men. The high cost of elections, coupled with women's lower income levels and restricted access to economic networks, significantly undermines their chances of contesting and sustaining political careers.
2. The study found that entrenched patriarchal norms, reinforced by cultural and religious beliefs, remain the most persistent obstacle to women's political inclusion. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, these structures discourage women from seeking elective positions and perpetuate perceptions of politics as a male-dominated space.
3. While Nigeria has adopted gender quotas and signed international conventions, their impact on women's political participation has been minimal. Weak implementation, lack of political will, tokenistic representation, and the failure to institutionalize these interventions have prevented them from achieving meaningful change in women's representation.

Conclusion

The analysis of women's political participation in Nigeria between 1999 and 2023 underscores that exclusion from governance is not incidental but a systemic outcome of structural, economic, and cultural imbalances. The persistence of these barriers reveals that democratic consolidation in Nigeria remains incomplete, as it continues to operate on a foundation that sidelines half of the citizenry. What emerges from this study is the recognition that addressing women's political underrepresentation requires more than policy declarations or symbolic quotas. The challenge lies in transforming the political economy of participation by

confronting the entrenched power structures that privilege male dominance, reforming party financing practices that exclude women, and dismantling cultural perceptions that define leadership as a male preserve. This conclusion affirms that the sustainability of Nigeria's democracy depends on its capacity to evolve into a genuinely inclusive system. Without intentional reforms that combine legal enforcement, economic empowerment, and cultural reorientation, the gap between advocacy for gender equality and the lived political realities of Nigerian women will continue to widen.

Recommendations

Drawing from the findings of this study, the following measures are proposed to strengthen women's political participation in Nigeria:

1. Create dedicated funding mechanisms such as campaign support funds, subsidized nomination fees, and access to credit facilities for female aspirants to reduce the economic disadvantages that limit their competitiveness.
2. Institutionalize a legally enforceable minimum of 35% representation for women across political parties and government appointments, with clear sanctions for defaulting institutions, to move beyond rhetoric into genuine inclusion.
3. Introduce sustained advocacy and gender-sensitive civic education programmes, especially in rural communities, while embedding gender equality into school curricula to challenge patriarchal norms and nurture future generations of inclusive leaders.

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