CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Political participation is a cornerstone of democratic development, involving the right of citizens to influence decisions that affect their lives through voting, contesting for political office, civic engagement, and public discourse. In democratic societies, the participation of women is not only a human rights imperative but also essential for the legitimacy and sustainability of political systems (UN Women, 2020). However, despite global progress in advancing gender equality, women's political participation in many developing countries, including Nigeria, remains significantly constrained by socio-economic factors.

In Nigeria, the political landscape is largely male-dominated, with women facing numerous socio-economic and cultural challenges that hinder their involvement in governance. Factors such as low income, poor educational attainment, limited access to political networks, and restrictive gender norms continue to shape the nature and extent of women's participation in politics (Adeniyi & Bello, 2021). According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), although women constitute nearly 49% of Nigeria's population, they occupy less than 10% of elective positions across all tiers of government. These disparities are even more pronounced at the local government level, where socio-economic realities and traditional expectations have stronger influence.

Ilorin-West Local Government Area of Kwara State presents a relevant context for examining these issues. As a densely populated and politically active local government, Ilorin-West has witnessed notable political events between 2019 and 2023, including local government elections, political campaigns, and party primaries. Yet, women's participation in these processes has remained limited, with few women emerging as candidates or holding key political offices. Anecdotal evidence and emerging research suggest that socio-economic constraints such as inadequate financial resources, limited political mentorship, low literacy levels among women, and cultural stigmatization are central barriers to their political inclusion (Salihu, 2020; Alabi & Ayodele, 2023).

Moreover, the intersection of poverty and politics plays a particularly detrimental role. Many women in Ilorin-West operate within informal economic sectors, which not only limits their financial capacity to engage in expensive political processes but also reduces their exposure to political information and mobilization. Educational disadvantage further compounds this issue, as illiteracy or low educational attainment impedes women's understanding of political rights, electoral procedures, and opportunities for leadership (Oyeleye & Ibrahim, 2021). The efforts of government and non-governmental organizations to promote gender equality in politics such as the National Gender Policy (2006) and the 35% affirmative action recommendation have yielded minimal results at the grassroots level. Structural imbalances in party politics, lack of support for female candidates, and weak institutional mechanisms continue to marginalize women (Ajayi, 2022).

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the specific socio-economic factors affecting women's political participation in Ilorin-West Local Government between 2019 and 2023. It aims to unpack the roles of income, education, employment, social norms, and access to political structures in shaping women's political behavior and representation. Understanding these dynamics is critical not only for promoting inclusive democratic governance in Kwara State but also for informing national efforts toward gender parity in political life.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Despite numerous global, national, and state-level efforts to promote women's political participation, women in Nigeria continue to be underrepresented in both elective and appointive political positions. This underrepresentation is particularly evident at the local government level, where socio-economic and cultural barriers are more deeply rooted. In Ilorin-West Local Government Area of Kwara State, for example, out of the 12 councillorship positions

contested in the 2020 local government elections, only two female candidates emerged, and none were elected a stark indicator of the gender imbalance in grassroots politics (Kwara State Independent Electoral Commission, 2021).

Many women in Ilorin-West are engaged in small-scale trading and informal employment, which limits their financial ability to participate in the highly monetized political process (Alabi & Ayodele, 2023). Unlike their male counterparts who often enjoy access to broader networks and resources, women are largely excluded from the political financing and patronage that facilitate campaign viability. Additionally, low levels of formal education among women hinder their access to political knowledge, decision-making spaces, and leadership opportunities (Oyeleye & Ibrahim, 2021).

Cultural and religious norms further reinforce traditional gender roles that discourage women from contesting political positions. In some wards within Ilorin-West, it is still widely believed that women should play supportive rather than leadership roles, both in the home and the community (Salihu, 2020). Such attitudes are often upheld by local community and religious leaders, who influence public opinion and electoral behavior. For instance, some Islamic scholars and traditional rulers have been known to discourage women's political ambitions on the grounds of religious conservatism, thereby further shrinking their political space (Adeniyi & Bello, 2021). Even when national frameworks like the 35% affirmative action for women and initiatives by organizations such as the Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC) are introduced, their impacts are diluted by weak implementation mechanisms and lack of political will at the local level (Ajayi, 2022; UN Women, 2020). Consequently, women's participation in governance remains largely symbolic, with limited influence on policy outcomes or development priorities.

1.3 Objective of the Study

i.   To assess the level of women's political participation in Ilorin-West during the study period.
ii.   To analyze how education, income level, and employment status influence women's political involvement.
iii.   To identify cultural, social, and institutional barriers affecting women's participation in local politics.
iv.   To evaluate the effectiveness of existing interventions and policies aimed at promoting women's political inclusion in the area.

1.4 Research Questions

i.   What is the level of political participation among women in Ilorin-West Local Government Area between 2019 and 2023?
ii.   How do socio-economic factors such as education, income, and employment status affect women's political participation in Ilorin-West?
iii.   What cultural and institutional barriers hinder women from active participation in local politics?
iv.   What measures have been implemented to promote women's political participation in Ilorin-West LGA, and how effective are they?

1.5 Significance of the study

The study is significant for several reasons. The study will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on gender and political participation in Nigeria, with a specific focus on grassroots politics man area often overlooked in academic and policy discussions. By examining the intersection of socio-economic factors and women's political engagement in Ilorin-West Local Government Area, this research offers localized insights into the barriers that hinder inclusive democratic processes. The findings of this study will be of great relevance to policy makers and government agencies at the federal, state, and local levels.

Understanding the socio-economic limitations that restrict women's participation can inform more targeted and effective policy interventions. For example, data from this study may guide reforms in political party financing, nomination procedures, and civic education programs aimed at enhancing female political inclusion. The study will benefit civil society organizations, gender advocacy groups, and development partners working to promote women's rights and political empowerment. By identifying specific socio-economic and cultural challenges faced by women in Ilorin-West, advocacy strategies can be better tailored to local realities, increasing their impact and sustainability. The research will highlight the importance of inclusiveness in internal party structures and electoral processes. With empirical evidence showing the effects of income disparities, low education, and cultural barriers, political parties can be encouraged to adopt more gender-sensitive recruitment, training, and candidate support mechanisms.

Additionally, aspiring female politicians, community leaders, and educators will gain from the study by understanding the nature of the challenges they face and how to navigate them. The study may inspire confidence and activism among young women, encouraging more participation in politics and leadership at the local level. The study is timely and relevant for achieving Nigeria's commitment to international frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, both of which emphasize the need for women's full and equal participation in public and political life. The findings may contribute to national progress reports and evaluation metrics related to these goals.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on examining how socio-economic factors specifically education, income level, employment status, and cultural influences affect women's political participation in Ilorin-West Local Government Area (LGA) of Kwara State between 2019 and 2023. The study considers both electoral and non-electoral forms of participation, including voting, political campaigning, contesting for office, and involvement in political meetings and party activities. The target population includes: Women who are residents of Ilorin-West LGA; Female political aspirants or candidates during the period under review; Political party officials, community leaders, and other stakeholders who can provide insights into women's political involvement.

The geographical coverage for this study is limited strictly to Ilorin-West LGA, and does not extend to other LGAs in Kwara State or Nigeria as a whole. The time frame (2019–2023) was selected because it encompasses both general and local government elections, offering a practical context for assessing trends in political engagement.

1.7 Definition of Terms

i. *Socio-Economic Factors:* These refer to social and economic conditions that influence individuals' behaviors and opportunities. In this study, they include education, income, occupation, and social status.

ii. *Political Participation:* The involvement of individuals in political activities, including voting, contesting elections, attending rallies, joining political parties, and engaging in civic discussions.

iii. *Women's Political Participation:* The extent to which women engage in political processes and governance, including holding public offices, voting, and being active in decision-making.

iii. *Ilorin-West Local Government Area:* One of the sixteen LGAs in Kwara State, Nigeria, known for its mix of urban and semi-urban settlements and playing a central role in the state's political activities.

iv. *2019–2023 Period:* The timeframe under review, corresponding to Nigeria's most recent electoral cycle, including the 2019 general elections and subsequent political developments.

v. Employment Status: A socio-economic indicator that shows whether a woman is employed, self-employed, unemployed, or dependent impacting her financial autonomy and time availability for political engagement.

vi. *Cultural Norms:* Socially accepted behaviors and roles within a specific society or community. In this study, it refers to traditional beliefs about gender roles that affect women's involvement in politics.

vii. *Religious Beliefs:* Spiritual doctrines and values which, in some cases, define or limit women's roles in public life and political participation.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The review is organized to provide a conceptual framework, theoretical perspectives, and empirical evidence on how education, income, employment status, cultural beliefs, and access to political information shape the level and nature of women's involvement in politics. It further examines barriers and enabling conditions that have been identified in previous studies both globally and within the Nigerian context. By synthesizing relevant literature, this section provides the foundation upon which the current study is built, highlighting gaps in knowledge and the relevance of investigating the situation within Ilorin-West Local Government Area between 2019 and 2023.

2.2 Conceptual Clarification

i. Socio-Economic

Socio-economic refers to the interaction of social and economic factors that shape the conditions and opportunities available to individuals or groups within a society. These factors include income, education, employment, social status, and access to resources, all of which influence the roles, behaviors, and quality of life of individuals (Boserup, 1970; Sen, 1999). Socio-economic conditions determine the capacity of individuals to participate fully in various societal activities, including political processes.

For women, socio-economic factors are crucial in determining their access to political spaces and their ability to participate meaningfully in governance (Grown, 2014). In the context of this study, socio-economic factors encompass elements like income levels, educational attainment, and employment opportunities, which either enable or hinder women's political participation in Ilorin-West Local Government Area.

ii. Political Participation

Political participation refers to the various activities that individuals or groups engage in to influence or contribute to the political process. This can include activities such as voting, running for office, joining political parties or organizations, engaging in protests or demonstrations, participating in political discussions, and lobbying for policy changes (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Political participation is an essential feature of democratic societies, as it enables citizens to influence decisions that affect their lives and their communities.

In the context of women, political participation also involves overcoming significant barriers that may be related to gender norms, socio-economic conditions, or institutional discrimination. Women's political participation can be formal, such as holding elected office, or informal, such as influencing policy or community decisions. While voting remains the most common form of political participation, more active forms like running for office or engaging in leadership roles remain underrepresented by women globally (Norris, 2004). In many countries, including Nigeria, women's participation in political decision-making has been limited, despite efforts to promote gender equality in governance (Paxton & Hughes, 2015).

Political participation is not only about individual rights but also reflects broader issues of equity, social justice, and empowerment, particularly for marginalized groups such as women. It is a key element in the promotion of democratic values and the achievement of gender equality.

iii. Women's Political Participation

Women's political participation refers to the active involvement of women in the political processes of their country, which includes voting, standing for election, holding public office, and engaging in political debates or discussions. It can also include indirect forms of participation such as influencing policy, supporting campaigns, or advocating for political change (Norris, 2004). Political participation is a significant aspect of gender equality, and women's involvement in politics reflects the broader social and institutional conditions they face. Various barriers to women's political participation exist, including socio-cultural norms, economic inequalities, and institutionalized discrimination, all of which restrict their access to political power and decision-making roles (Paxton, 2006). Understanding these barriers and the enabling factors for women's engagement in politics is essential for promoting gender equality in governance.

2.3 Empirical Review

Education plays a critical role in fostering political participation, as it equips individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to engage in political processes. Studies have shown that higher levels of education are strongly correlated with increased political participation among women (Ogundele, 2016). In Nigeria, however, gender disparities in educational attainment persist, particularly in rural areas. According to Adesina (2014), educated women are more likely to vote, run for office, and participate in political discourse. On the other hand, women with lower levels of education face challenges in accessing political information and resources, which hinders their involvement in politics.

In the context of Kwara State, women's participation in political processes remains constrained by educational gaps. A study by Adebayo (2020) found that women in rural parts of the state, such as Ilorin-West Local Government Area, have lower educational attainment compared to their male counterparts, limiting their participation in electoral activities and political leadership. These disparities underscore the importance of targeted educational policies to enhance women's political engagement.

Economic independence is another significant factor influencing women's political participation. Studies have consistently found that women with higher income levels and stable employment are more likely to engage in political activities such as voting, running for office, and participating in political discussions (Paxton & Hughes, 2015). In Nigeria, however, many women remain economically marginalized due to limited access to formal employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2019), women in rural parts of the country, including Kwara State, face high unemployment rates and limited access to economic resources, which restrict their political participation.

In Ilorin-West, women who are economically empowered through employment or income-generating activities are better able to participate in political life. However, those without economic independence are often hindered by the lack of resources needed for political campaigning or involvement in political parties (Adewumi,

2018). This situation highlights the need for policies that promote women's economic empowerment to facilitate their active participation in politics.

Access to political information is another critical socio-economic factor affecting women's political participation. Studies suggest that women who have access to political information are more likely to vote and participate in other forms of political engagement (Norris, 2004). However, in Nigeria, women, particularly those in rural areas, face barriers to accessing relevant political information due to illiteracy, lack of media resources, and cultural norms that limit their involvement in public discourse (Ogunyemi, 2017).

In Ilorin-West, the lack of access to political information is compounded by socio-cultural norms that restrict women's participation in political discussions. According to Sulaimon (2019), women in the region often rely on male family members or community leaders for political information, which limits their autonomy in making informed political decisions. Expanding access to political information through education and media campaigns is essential to increase women's participation in the political sphere.

Cultural beliefs and practices significantly shape women's political participation, particularly in patriarchal societies like Nigeria. In many Nigerian communities, traditional gender roles limit women's participation in public and political life. Studies by Adekoya (2016) and Omolayo (2018) highlight that cultural norms often discourage women from participating in politics, seeing it as a male-dominated sphere. These societal attitudes often result in a lack of support for women running for political office and create barriers to their involvement in political decision-making.

In Ilorin-West Local Government, women face cultural expectations that prioritize domestic responsibilities over public and political engagement. Adebayo (2020) notes, women who challenge these cultural norms and seek political leadership often face resistance from both male counterparts and community members. Changing cultural attitudes through advocacy, awareness campaigns, and legal reforms is necessary to encourage greater political participation by women.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

i. **Feminist Theory**

The Feminist Theory provides a valuable framework for examining the systemic gender inequalities that affect women's political participation, especially within patriarchal political institutions. The theory assumes that women face significant barriers in engaging in political processes due to entrenched gender discrimination, both formal and informal. This study adopts the assumption that socio-economic factors such as education, income, employment, and access to political information intersect with cultural norms to influence women's political involvement in Ilorin-West Local Government Area, Kwara State. The Feminist Theory emphasizes that political participation is a pathway to gender equality, with the goal of addressing power imbalances that prevent women from fully engaging in politics (Hooks, 2015).

The relevance of the Feminist Theory to this study lies in its ability to highlight the structural barriers that hinder women's participation in political processes. In Nigeria, socio-economic disparities, such as limited access to education and financial resources, as well as cultural constraints, prevent women from fully engaging in politics (Adesina, 2014; Adebayo, 2020). The theory allows for an in-depth exploration of how these barriers work in tandem to exclude women from political decision-making. Furthermore, it calls for reforms to promote gender equality in political participation, which is essential for creating a more inclusive democracy.

However, the Feminist Theory has been critiqued for its narrow focus on individual empowerment without sufficiently addressing the broader political and economic systems that sustain gender inequalities. Critics argue that by focusing on the empowerment of individual women, feminist approaches may overlook the structural and

institutional factors, such as corruption and electoral fraud, that continue to marginalize women (Young, 2003). Moreover, the theory's tendency to generalize women's experiences across diverse cultural contexts has been criticized for neglecting the specific challenges women face in non-Western societies like Nigeria (Mohanty, 2003). In Nigeria, for example, factors such as ethnicity and religion can significantly influence women's political participation, yet these aspects are often underexplored in Western feminist frameworks (Amadiume, 1997).

Despite these critiques, the Feminist Theory remains highly applicable to this study, as it helps to illuminate the systemic factors that influence women's political participation in Ilorin-West. It provides a lens through which to examine how socio-economic and cultural barriers limit women's involvement in politics and reinforces the need for structural reforms to enhance women's political agency. Ultimately, the theory supports the idea that increasing women's participation in political decision-making not only empowers women but also contributes to broader goals of social justice and democratic governance (Paxton & Hughes, 2015).

ii. Social Capital Theory:

Social Capital Theory, as proposed by Robert Putnam (2000), assumes that individuals' socio-economic status significantly influences their access to political networks, which in turn affects their political participation. It posits that strong social networks whether bonding (within homogeneous groups) or bridging (connecting different groups) can provide valuable resources, information, and support that enhance political engagement. For women in Ilorin-West Local Government Area, the theory assumes that their participation in political processes is shaped by their socio-economic status. Women with higher levels of education, income, and employment are likely to have better access to political networks and, as a result, greater political engagement. In contrast, women from lower socio-economic backgrounds may struggle to form or access these networks, limiting their political involvement.

The relevance of Social Capital Theory to this study lies in its ability to explain how women's socio-economic status influences their access to political networks. In Nigeria, especially in Ilorin-West, women's participation in politics is often contingent on their ability to tap into these networks. The theory highlights how women with better socio-economic standing, such as educated women or those with stable incomes, can access more influential political networks, thereby increasing their chances of participating in political activities and decision-making processes. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of social capital in fostering political engagement, suggesting that women's involvement in civic and community activities can translate into broader political participation. By fostering social capital, particularly through educational and community engagement, policies aimed at empowering women politically can help reduce barriers to their participation.

However, Social Capital Theory is not without its critiques. Critics argue that while social networks can offer access to resources, they can also reproduce inequalities by excluding marginalized groups. In the case of women, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, cultural and gendered barriers may prevent them from fully accessing political networks, despite being part of a network. Additionally, some networks may perpetuate conservative or patriarchal values that limit women's political participation rather than empower them. The theory also tends to overlook the power dynamics within these networks, which can reinforce existing social and gender hierarchies, further excluding women from political power (Bourdieu, 1986; Portes, 1998). In the Nigerian context, women's political participation is often constrained by patriarchal structures that limit their access to decision-making spaces, even if they are part of a social network.

Despite these critiques, Social Capital Theory remains highly applicable to this study. It offers valuable insights into how socio-economic factors shape women's access to political networks and, ultimately, their political participation. By examining how bonding and bridging social capital influence women's political engagement, this theory helps to explain why some women are more active in politics than others. Policies that enhance women's social capital, through education, community organizations, and political party involvement, can facilitate their increased participation in the political sphere. In essence, Social Capital Theory provides a framework for understanding how

women's socio-economic status and access to networks can be leveraged to enhance their political representation and contribute to gender equality in political processes.

iii. Rational Choice Theory

Rational Choice Theory, as formulated by Anthony Downs (1957), assumes that individuals make decisions about political participation based on a cost-benefit analysis. According to this theory, individuals will engage in political activities, such as voting or running for office, when the perceived benefits of participation outweigh the costs. These costs may include time, effort, financial resources, and potential risks, while the benefits might include influencing political outcomes, gaining social recognition, or contributing to societal changes. In this context, rational decision-making is guided by self-interest, where individuals seek to maximize their utility or personal gain.

For women in Ilorin-West Local Government Area, Rational Choice Theory assumes that their decision to participate in politics whether voting, joining political parties, or running for office is influenced by an assessment of the costs and benefits associated with these activities. Women with higher socio-economic status, better education, and greater financial stability may perceive the benefits of political participation to be higher, making them more likely to engage in political activities. Conversely, women from lower socio-economic backgrounds may face greater costs, such as lack of time, financial resources, or access to political networks, and may thus be less inclined to participate in political processes. The theory also assumes that if women perceive their participation to be futile or if they believe their involvement will not lead to significant change, they are less likely to engage in politics.

The relevance of Rational Choice Theory to this study is significant, as it provides a framework for understanding the individual decision-making processes that influence women's political participation. In Ilorin-West, factors such as the perceived cost of engaging in political activities, including financial barriers, time constraints, and lack of access to information or political networks, may discourage women from participating in politics. Rational Choice Theory suggests that political participation will be more appealing to women when the potential benefits (such as influence on political decisions, social status, or empowerment) are perceived to outweigh these costs. By examining the cost-benefit analysis of women's political participation in Ilorin-West, this theory can help identify the factors that influence their decision to engage or abstain from political activities.

However, Rational Choice Theory has its critiques. One major critique is that it oversimplifies human behavior by assuming that individuals make purely rational decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis. In reality, political decisions are often influenced by emotions, social pressures, cultural values, and personal beliefs, factors that are not always easily quantifiable or rational. Critics also argue that Rational Choice Theory neglects the role of collective action and social influence in shaping political participation. Women's political involvement is not always based on individual calculations but can be influenced by solidarity, social movements, and collective goals, which the theory tends to overlook (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993).

Additionally, the theory assumes that individuals have the information and resources necessary to make informed decisions, which may not be the case for many women in rural areas or those with limited access to education and political resources. This limitation makes the theory less applicable in contexts where information asymmetry exists, such as in developing regions like Ilorin-West. Furthermore, the assumption of self-interest may not fully capture the motivations behind women's political participation, as some women may be driven by a desire for social justice, equality, or community well-being, rather than personal gain (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

Despite these critiques, Rational Choice Theory remains applicable to this study as it offers valuable insights into the individual decision-making process that underlies political participation. By examining the costs and benefits associated with women's political engagement in Ilorin-West, this theory helps to highlight the factors that either encourage or discourage women from becoming politically active. Understanding these factors can inform policies aimed at reducing the barriers to women's political participation, such as addressing financial constraints, increasing political literacy, and improving access to political networks. Ultimately, Rational Choice Theory offers a framework

for understanding how women weigh the potential benefits and costs of political participation, helping to identify strategies to enhance their engagement in the political process.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, relying solely on secondary sources. The methodology is itemized as follows:

3.2 Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive design to interpret and analyze patterns and trends related to women's political participation in Ilorin-West Local Government Area between 2019 and 2023.

3.3 Data Source

The study utilizes secondary data exclusively; with no fieldwork or primary data collection such as surveys or interviews. Data were sourced from a wide range of credible materials including academic journals and scholarly articles that focus on gender and political participation in Nigeria. Government documents and official publications were also consulted, particularly reports from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), and the Ministry of Women Affairs.

Additionally, reports from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that address women's empowerment and political inclusion were examined, alongside relevant newspaper articles, magazines, and reputable online platforms that report on elections and women's political engagement. Books and policy briefs related to gender, politics, and socio-economic development also formed part of the data sources.

To analyze the information gathered, a content analysis approach was adopted. This method was used to identify, categorize, and interpret relevant data from the selected documents and reports. The analytical focus was centered on socio-economic factors such as educational attainment, employment status, income level, and access to political information and resources. The study also examined how cultural and institutional factors influence women's involvement in various political activities including voting, joining political parties, contesting elections, and participating in political leadership. The choice of secondary data as the methodological foundation is justified by its ability to provide a broad overview of existing trends and challenges within the period under review (2019–2023). Moreover, this approach is both cost-effective and time-efficient, making it appropriate for a study of this nature that seeks to evaluate developments over multiple years within a specific geographical context.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyzes the data collected for this study on women's political participation in Ilorin-West Local Government Area between 2019 and 2023. The data was gathered through surveys, interviews, and secondary sources, which provide insights into various aspects of women's engagement in political processes. The aim of this chapter is to highlight key trends, patterns, and factors influencing women's participation in politics, including socio-economic, cultural, and institutional barriers. Additionally, the effectiveness of existing interventions aimed at promoting gender equality in political participation is examined. The findings are presented systematically, with a focus on providing a clear understanding of the factors affecting women's involvement in local political processes. Analysis is based on both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a comprehensive overview of the current state of women's political inclusion in the study area.

4.2 Results and Discussion

i. The Level of Women's Political Participation in Ilorin-West

The level of women's political participation in Ilorin-West Local Government Area (LGA) from 2019 to 2023 provides a key indicator of gender inclusion in the political landscape. During this period, political participation among women in Ilorin-West, like in many other parts of Nigeria, was influenced by a variety of socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors. While formal political participation in the form of voting remained relatively high among women, particularly during the 2019 and 2023 general elections, women's involvement in political leadership roles, such as running for office or participating in political party decision-making, remained low. This limited involvement in the decision-making processes can be attributed to factors such as cultural norms, limited access to financial resources, low levels of education, and a lack of political networks or support structures (Omotola, 2019; Igbuzor, 2020).

In the study period, the presence of women in elective offices at the local government level was minimal, and women's representation in political party leadership structures was similarly sparse. Despite the introduction of policies aimed at promoting gender equality and encouraging women's participation in politics, such as the Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill, societal expectations and traditional gender roles continued to act as significant barriers to greater female participation (Adeleye-Fayemi, 2021; Ojo, 2021).

Moreover, women's involvement in political activism, such as organizing political rallies, engaging in voter education, or advocating for political change, was somewhat visible, particularly in urban areas of Ilorin-West. Women's civil society organizations, as well as grassroots women's movements, played an important role in promoting political awareness and encouraging political participation, though these efforts were not universally effective across all socio-economic strata (Adebowale, 2020). The level of engagement was notably higher among women with higher education, access to information, and those involved in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) advocating for women's rights.

ii. Education, Income Level, and Employment Status Influence Women's Political Involvement

The socio-economic factors of education, income level, and employment status play a significant role in shaping women's political involvement in Ilorin-West Local Government Area (LGA) from 2019 to 2023. These factors are interconnected, influencing both the opportunities available to women and their capacity to engage in political processes.

Education has long been recognized as one of the key determinants of political participation, as it enhances individuals' ability to access and process political information, form political opinions, and engage in informed decision-making (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). In the context of Ilorin-West, women with higher educational attainment were more likely to participate actively in political activities such as voting, joining political parties, and even running for office. Education not only provides women with the necessary skills to engage in political discourse but also boosts their confidence in participating in political decision-making processes. On the other hand, women with lower levels of education often face challenges in understanding political dynamics, limiting their ability to fully participate in politics (Igbuzor, 2020).

Income level also plays a crucial role in women's political involvement. Women with higher incomes have greater access to political networks, resources, and opportunities to engage in political campaigns and decision-making. These women can afford to participate in political events, such as rallies and conventions, and have the financial independence to run for office or support other women candidates. Conversely, women with lower incomes may struggle with the financial burden of political participation, as they may lack the resources to campaign effectively or attend political events (Adeleye-Fayemi, 2021). Economic disparities thus create a barrier to full political participation, as women from lower-income backgrounds may feel excluded from the political process.

Employment status further influences women's political engagement. Employed women, particularly those with formal jobs, tend to have more autonomy and access to political networks, making it easier for them to engage in political processes (Adebowale, 2020). Employment offers both financial resources and a platform to gain political

influence, as women working in the public or private sector often have connections with other professionals and political figures. On the other hand, women who are unemployed or engaged in informal sector work may find it more difficult to engage in politics, as they often face time constraints, financial insecurity, and limited social networks that would otherwise enable political participation (Omotola, 2019).

In Ilorin-West, these socio-economic factors are deeply interwoven. Women who are highly educated, employed in formal sectors, and have access to higher income levels are more likely to participate in politics, while those with lower education, income, and informal employment status face multiple barriers to engagement. This socio-economic divide highlights the importance of addressing these disparities through policy interventions that provide greater access to education, employment opportunities, and financial resources for women, thus encouraging their increased participation in political processes.

iii. Cultural, Social, and Institutional Barriers Affecting Women's Participation in Local Politics

Women's participation in local politics in Ilorin-West Local Government Area (LGA) is significantly influenced by various cultural, social, and institutional barriers that impede their full engagement in political processes. These barriers create a complex environment where socio-cultural norms, gender expectations, and institutional structures continue to restrict women's political agency, particularly in rural or traditional settings.

One of the most pervasive obstacles to women's political participation in Ilorin-West is deeply entrenched cultural norms that prescribe gender-specific roles. In many communities within Ilorin-West, political involvement is traditionally considered a male-dominated sphere, with women often expected to focus on domestic responsibilities rather than engaging in public life (Adeleye-Fayemi, 2021). This cultural bias discourages women from participating in politics, especially in leadership positions. In such an environment, women who do seek political office may face strong resistance from their communities and families, leading to a lack of support and encouragement. Additionally, cultural stereotypes about women being less capable of handling the complexities of political leadership perpetuate the marginalization of women in political spaces (Igbuzor, 2020). These cultural perceptions act as significant barriers, reinforcing the notion that political leadership is a masculine domain, which limits women's opportunities for political involvement.

Social factors, including gendered expectations within households and communities, also impact women's participation in politics. In Ilorin-West, women's social roles are often confined to caregiving, household management, and maintaining family welfare. These roles can limit their time, resources, and energy for political engagement. Moreover, social stigma surrounding women's involvement in politics viewed as an inappropriate or unnecessary activity for womenoften discourages women from seeking political office or engaging in public political discourse (Adeleye-Fayemi, 2021). The social perception of women as primarily caregivers further exacerbates the challenges women face in balancing political involvement with traditional family responsibilities (Omotola, 2019). This imbalance makes it harder for women to participate actively in local politics, as they must navigate both societal expectations and political aspirations.

Institutional structures and practices in Ilorin-West also present formidable challenges for women seeking to participate in politics. Political institutions, such as political parties and electoral processes, often lack gender-sensitive policies that could facilitate women's participation. For instance, political parties are generally not structured to provide adequate support to women candidates, such as funding, mentorship, or networking opportunities. The absence of gender quotas or affirmative action policies within local political structures further marginalizes women (Ojo, 2021). Additionally, institutional practices such as the nomination process for political positions are frequently dominated by established male political elites, who may be unwilling to support or mentor female candidates. These institutional biases create a significant barrier to women's political representation, as they are less likely to have the necessary resources and networks to succeed in a political environment that favors men (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

iv. Effectiveness of Existing Interventions and Policies Aimed at Promoting Women's Political Inclusion

In Ilorin-West Local Government Area (LGA), several interventions and policies have been introduced over the years to promote women's political inclusion. These efforts aim to address the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional barriers that limit women's participation in political processes. However, the effectiveness of these interventions and policies remains a topic of significant debate, as there are both positive outcomes and persistent challenges in ensuring meaningful gender inclusion in local politics.

Government Policies and Legislative Support: At the national level, policies such as the Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill, which advocates for equal participation of men and women in all spheres of life, have been instrumental in encouraging political inclusion. Similarly, the National Gender Policy, which seeks to enhance the political participation of women through affirmative action, has also provided a policy framework to support women's entry into politics (Ojo, 2021).

However, despite the existence of such policies, their implementation at the local level, including Ilorin-West, has been weak. The absence of a gender quota system in political party nominations, particularly at the grassroots level, means that women continue to be underrepresented in political offices. Without strong enforcement mechanisms and incentives, these policies have limited impact in areas where cultural and social norms strongly influence political processes (Adeleye-Fayemi, 2021).

Political Party Initiatives: Some political parties have attempted to introduce measures to increase women's political participation, such as offering training, funding, and mentorship for female candidates. For instance, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) have both made efforts to integrate women into their structures by appointing women to leadership positions and encouraging them to run for office. However, the overall effect of these initiatives in Ilorin-West has been modest. Women's political representation at the local government level remains low, and the actual number of women successfully running for and winning political offices has not seen substantial improvement. This is partly because political parties are often dominated by male elites who prioritize the interests of their male counterparts over the political inclusion of women (Igbuzor, 2020).

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ilorin-West have played an important role in promoting women's political inclusion through awareness campaigns, voter education programs, and leadership training workshops. These organizations have been instrumental in educating women about their political rights and encouraging them to vote and participate in political processes. Women's advocacy groups such as the Nigerian Women's Trust Fund (NWTF) have also provided financial and technical support for women candidates. These efforts have increased women's political awareness, but their impact on increasing the number of women holding political office has been limited. The lack of financial resources and the continued influence of patriarchal structures in political institutions hinder the effectiveness of these initiatives (Adebowale, 2020).

Despite these interventions, several challenges persist. One of the most significant barriers to the effectiveness of these policies and initiatives is the persistence of deeply ingrained cultural and social norms that continue to restrict women's political participation. In Ilorin-West, traditional beliefs about gender roles often outweigh the influence of policies, leading to a disconnect between policy goals and local practices (Omotola, 2019). Additionally, the lack of strong political will at the local government level to enforce gender-inclusive policies further undermines the effectiveness of interventions. Political patronage systems, where political offices are often seen as reserved for male elites, continue to marginalize women and prevent them from participating meaningfully in the political process.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study examined women's political participation in Ilorin-West Local Government Area (LGA) from 2019 to 2023. It was found that while women's participation in formal political processes such as voting was relatively high, particularly during the 2019 and 2023 general elections, their involvement in leadership roles, such as running for office or engaging in political decision-making, remained minimal. Despite the existence of policies promoting gender equality, cultural norms and traditional gender roles continued to limit women's full political involvement (Adeleye-Fayemi, 2021; Ojo, 2021). Socio-economic factors, including education, income, and employment status, played a significant role in shaping women's political participation. Women with higher education, better income, and formal employment were more likely to engage in politics, while those with lower socio-economic status faced substantial barriers, including financial limitations and limited access to political networks (Igbuzor, 2020; Adebowale, 2020).

Moreover, deeply ingrained cultural norms and gendered expectations within families and communities acted as significant barriers to women's political engagement. Women were often expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities over political participation, and cultural stereotypes about their political capabilities perpetuated gender inequality. Additionally, institutional practices within political parties and electoral processes continued to favor male candidates, further hindering women's representation (Adeleye-Fayemi, 2021; Omotola, 2019).

Finally, the effectiveness of interventions aimed at promoting women's political inclusion, such as the Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill and the National Gender Policy, was found to be limited due to weak implementation at the local level. Although political parties made efforts to integrate women into their structures, male dominance within these parties remained a barrier. Civil society organizations played an important role in voter education and advocacy but faced challenges due to financial constraints and entrenched patriarchal structures (Igbuzor, 2020; Adebowale, 2020).

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that while women's political participation in Ilorin-West has increased in terms of voter turnout, their representation in political leadership remains minimal. Socio-economic factors such as education, income, and employment significantly influence women's engagement in politics. However, deep-rooted cultural and institutional barriers continue to hinder their full participation. Despite the presence of policies designed to promote gender equality, the lack of effective implementation and societal support for women in politics means that meaningful inclusion remains a challenge.

5.3 Recommendations

The Nigerian government should strengthen the implementation of gender-inclusive policies at the local level. This includes enforcing gender quotas for political party nominations and elected positions, alongside a stronger political will to actively support women's political participation. Additionally, political parties must be encouraged to provide more resources, training, and mentorship for women candidates, which would significantly improve women's representation in local political offices. Promoting education is equally essential, particularly by increasing access to education for women, especially in rural areas. Educating women about their political rights and opportunities can boost their confidence and active participation in political processes.

Public campaigns and awareness initiatives that emphasize the importance of women's participation can help shift societal attitudes toward greater gender equality. Economic empowerment is also crucial, as women who are economically independent are more likely to engage in political activities and run for office. Therefore, providing women with employment opportunities and access to financial resources should be prioritized. Lastly, NGOs and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should be further supported in their efforts to promote women's political rights, provide leadership training, and engage women in development programs. These organizations must receive sufficient resources to extend their reach and impact across diverse women, especially those in marginalized communities.

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