

CHAPTER ONE.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The participation of women in politics is a fundamental component of inclusive governance and a critical measure of a nation's democratic health. It ensures that diverse perspectives are represented in policy-making and promotes equitable development. Globally, women's political representation has steadily improved over the past few decades, propelled by international frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action (UN Women, 2020). These instruments call on governments to eliminate barriers to women's political participation and to adopt temporary special measures like gender quotas to address historical imbalances (Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU], 2023).

Countries that have adopted such measures have seen tangible improvements. For example, Rwanda leads the world with women occupying over 60% of seats in its lower house of parliament, a direct result of constitutional quotas and institutional support (Bauer, 2021). Similarly, countries like Sweden, Norway, and South Africa have implemented policies that not only mandate gender quotas but also support women's political training, funding, and protection, resulting in more balanced political representation (IPU, 2023; Tripp & Kang, 2008).

Despite being a signatory to CEDAW and having domestic constitutional provisions that guarantee equal rights, Nigeria continues to lag significantly behind in terms of women's political inclusion. The underrepresentation of women in elective and appointive positions is a persistent issue. In the 2023 general elections, women won only 4.5% of the seats in the National Assembly, falling far below the 35% affirmative action benchmark recommended by Nigeria's National Gender Policy (Independent National Electoral Commission [INEC], 2023; Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2021). This level of representation is among the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa, where countries like Senegal, Ethiopia, and Namibia have made notable progress through the adoption of legal quotas and sustained gender advocacy (IPU, 2023). In contrast, Nigeria has struggled with poor implementation of gender-focused legislation and limited political will (Adeniyi, 2021).

The disparity in Nigeria persists despite women constituting nearly half of the country's population and often forming a majority of the voting public (National Population Commission, 2022). Cultural, economic, and institutional challenges including deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, lack of political funding, and male-dominated party structures continue to restrict women's political advancement (Arowolo & Aluko, 2020; Chukwuemeka & Agbara, 2018). Furthermore, the failure to domesticate gender equity laws and enforce gender-sensitive reforms continues to weaken progress (Ezeilo, 2021). To align with global standards and truly reflect democratic values, Nigeria must go beyond rhetoric and implement comprehensive strategies that address structural barriers and promote the active participation of women at all levels of political decision-making.

The aim of this study is to critically examine the structural, socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers that hinder Nigerian women from full participation in politics. Additionally, it seeks to identify potential strategies and opportunities that could facilitate increased female representation in political decision-making processes. By analyzing both the challenges and opportunities, the study contributes to ongoing efforts to foster gender equality in Nigeria's democratic space.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Despite constitutional guarantees and Nigeria's commitment to international gender equality frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the African Union Protocol on the Rights of Women, women's representation in political offices remains critically low. Section 42 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria guarantees freedom from discrimination, yet this legal provision has not translated into equitable political participation (Ezeilo, 2021).

Women constitute approximately 49% of Nigeria's population and over 47% of registered voters, according to the National Population Commission (2022) and INEC (2023), but they occupy less than 10% of elective and appointive positions. For instance, in the 2023 general elections, out of 1,553 legislative seats contested, only 76 women emerged as winners, accounting for just 4.9% of the total (INEC, 2023). Similarly, only 7 out of 109 Senators and 15 out of 360 Members of the House of Representatives were women.

This underrepresentation is driven by several interlocking factors. Patriarchal norms continue to assign women traditional domestic roles while framing leadership as a masculine domain (Chukwuemeka & Agbara, 2018). Economic barriers, such as limited access to campaign funding, restrict many women from competing on an equal footing with male counterparts (Yusuf, 2017). Cultural and religious practices, especially in Northern Nigeria, discourage female political involvement by placing restrictions on women's visibility and participation in public life (Adamu, 2020).

Moreover, political party structures remain male-dominated, with few women occupying leadership roles or receiving party nominations for winnable positions (Arowolo & Aluko, 2020).

Although numerous advocacy programs and legal reforms have been proposed such as the 35% affirmative action provision in the National Gender Policy (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2021) their impact has been minimal due to poor enforcement, lack of political will, and public resistance. The repeated failure to pass the Gender Equality Bill in the National Assembly further highlights the systemic obstacles to institutional reform.

This study therefore seeks to critically investigate the factors limiting women's political participation in Nigeria and explore potential pathways such as legal reforms, political party restructuring, and capacity-building initiatives for improving gender parity in the country's political system.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

- i. To identify the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers affecting women's political participation in Nigeria.
- ii. To analyze the role of political parties and electoral processes in limiting or promoting female representation.
- iii. To examine the effectiveness of existing gender-related policies and legal frameworks.
- iv. To explore opportunities and strategies for enhancing women's political inclusion.

1.4. Research Questions

- i. What are the major socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria?
- ii. How do political parties and electoral practices influence female political representation?
- iii. What policies or legal frameworks exist to promote gender inclusion, and how effective are they?
- iv. What are the opportunities and strategies for enhancing women's political inclusion in Nigeria?

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. It provides a comprehensive understanding of the persistent challenges that hinder women's political empowerment in Nigeria. The findings will inform policymakers, civil society organizations, political parties, and international agencies on effective strategies to promote gender equality in governance. Additionally, the study will contribute to academic literature on gender and politics, while also serving as an advocacy tool for promoting inclusive democratic processes.

1.6. Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on women's political participation in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024, relying exclusively on secondary data sourced from scholarly publications, government reports, and documents from international agencies. It addresses key issues such as electoral representation, appointments to political offices, and the implementation of gender-inclusion policies within the Nigerian political landscape.

However, the study is subject to certain limitations. Its reliance on secondary data may result in the absence of personal narratives or up-to-date insights from grassroots political actors. Additionally, the broad national scope of the study means that regional variations and context-specific challenges across Nigeria are not deeply explored. Furthermore, the lack of field interviews restricts the inclusion of firsthand experiences and perspectives from women actively engaged in politics, which could have enriched the analysis.

1.7. Definition of Terms

- i. *Political Participation*: Activities by citizens aimed at influencing decisions or selecting leaders within the political system, including voting, contesting for office, or engaging in civic advocacy.
- ii. *Representation*: The presence and active involvement of individuals, especially women, in political decision-making and governance structures.
- iii. *Gender Equality*: The state in which access to rights and opportunities is unaffected by gender.
- vi. *Electoral System*: The framework that defines how votes are cast, counted, and translated into seats in a legislature or office.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of existing literature related to women's political participation in Nigeria. It examines scholarly perspectives on the historical evolution of women in politics, the socio-cultural and institutional barriers affecting their representation, and the role of political parties and electoral processes. The chapter also explores various national and international efforts aimed at promoting gender equality in governance. Furthermore, the chapter incorporates relevant theoretical frameworks that provide a conceptual lens through which the issue of women's underrepresentation in politics can be better understood and analyzed. The purpose of this review is to identify existing research gaps, clarify the scope of the problem, and build a foundation for the analysis undertaken in this study.

2.2 Conceptual Clarification

2.2.1 Political Participation

Political participation refers to the various ways individuals engage in political processes, including voting, contesting elections, political activism, advocacy, and involvement in policy formulation. According to Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978), political participation is the essence of democracy, as it ensures that citizens influence governance. In the Nigerian context, participation is often skewed in favor of men, with women facing significant barriers that hinder their full inclusion in political life.

2.2.2 Gender Equality

Gender equality is the state in which individuals of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. It encompasses equal access to education, employment, leadership, and political power (UN Women, 2020). In Nigeria, gender equality in politics remains largely aspirational due to deeply rooted patriarchal structures and cultural norms.

2.2.3 Representation

Representation in politics implies that diverse segments of society, including women, have a voice in decision-making processes. Pitkin (1967) distinguishes between descriptive representation (presence of women in political positions) and substantive representation (acting in the interest of women). Nigeria's struggle with both forms underscores the ongoing gender imbalance in political institutions.

2.2.4 Affirmative Action

Affirmative action refers to deliberate policies and measures aimed at correcting historical and structural inequalities faced by marginalized groups. Nigeria's National Gender Policy recommends 35% affirmative action for women in political and decision-making positions, yet implementation remains weak due to lack of political will and institutional commitment (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2021).

2.3 Empirical Review

Arowolo and Aluko (2020) argue that political parties in Nigeria which serve as the primary gateway to elective offices tend to marginalize female aspirants. This marginalization is often manifested through male-dominated party hierarchies, discriminatory nomination procedures, and prohibitively expensive nomination forms, all of which discourage women from active contestation. Political parties rarely support female candidates for viable positions, and even when women emerge as candidates, they often receive limited campaign support.

Economic barriers are another major constraint. Yusuf (2017) notes that women generally have less access to financial resources compared to men, which limits their ability to fund competitive political campaigns. Given the monetized nature of Nigeria's political system where winning elections is often tied to financial muscle this puts female aspirants at a severe disadvantage. The lack of economic empowerment among many women, particularly at the grassroots level, further reinforces their political marginalization.

Religious and cultural values also play a central role in shaping gender roles and expectations. Adamu (2020) observed that in Northern Nigeria, conservative religious interpretations and traditional norms often discourage women from participating in public life, including politics. In these contexts, political engagement by women is frequently viewed as inappropriate or even immoral. Meanwhile, Chukwuemeka and Agbara (2018) point out that patriarchal attitudes are not confined to rural or conservative regions; even in urban centers and among the educated elite, leadership is still widely perceived as a masculine domain. These deep-seated cultural beliefs continue to undermine efforts aimed at promoting gender equality in political representation.

On the policy front, Nigeria has made several formal commitments to gender equality, yet implementation has been weak. Ezeilo (2021) emphasizes that although Nigeria is a signatory to international frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the country has failed to domesticate and enforce many of these agreements. Notably, repeated attempts to pass the Gender Equality Bill in the National Assembly have been unsuccessful, largely due to resistance from male lawmakers and cultural conservatives. This legislative inertia highlights the lack of institutional support for gender mainstreaming in governance.

Despite these numerous barriers, there are notable success stories that serve as evidence of women's potential when afforded equal opportunities. For instance, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who served as Nigeria's Finance Minister and is currently the Director-General of the World Trade Organization, and Amina J. Mohammed, former Environment Minister and current Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, illustrate the capabilities of Nigerian women in high-level leadership roles. However, such figures are often the exception rather than the norm. Their achievements, while inspiring, do not reflect a systemic change in the political landscape, as the overall level of female political representation in Nigeria remains alarmingly low.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

2.4.1 Liberal Feminist Theory

Liberal Feminist Theory advocates for equal opportunities for men and women, particularly in education, employment, and political participation. The theory asserts that gender equality can be achieved through legal and institutional reforms that dismantle the structural barriers preventing women from accessing power (Tong, 2009). It emphasizes that both men and women should have equal rights and opportunities in all spheres of life, including politics, and that removing discriminatory laws and practices is key to achieving this goal. The theory assumes that men and women are fundamentally equal in capabilities and deserve equal access to political representation and leadership roles. It also posits that legal reforms can effectively change the structures that perpetuate gender inequality and create a more inclusive political system.

This theory is particularly relevant to the Nigerian context, where despite constitutional guarantees for gender equality and Nigeria's commitments to international frameworks such as the CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action, women's political participation remains disproportionately low. Although policies like the National Gender Policy advocate for 35% female representation in governance, weak enforcement and the absence of gender-sensitive political reforms have left these policies largely ineffective. Liberal Feminist Theory's focus on legal and institutional reforms aligns with Nigeria's need for stronger, more enforceable gender policies that directly address the barriers women face in politics. These barriers include male-dominated political parties, expensive nomination processes, and a lack of support for female candidates.

However, Liberal Feminist Theory has been critiqued for focusing primarily on legal reforms while overlooking the deeper cultural and societal structures that perpetuate gender inequality. Critics argue that such reforms are insufficient in societies where patriarchal norms and cultural practices heavily influence political participation. In Nigeria, for example, religious and cultural expectations in the northern regions limit women's visibility in politics, while even in urban centers, leadership roles are often still seen as the domain of men (Adamu, 2020; Chukwuemeka & Agbara, 2018). Furthermore, the theory has been critiqued for its emphasis on individual rights and autonomy, which can overlook the collective challenges faced by marginalized women, particularly those in rural or economically disadvantaged areas.

Despite these critiques, Liberal Feminist Theory remains applicable to this study as it underscores the importance of legal reforms and institutional changes in addressing gender inequality in political participation. By applying this theory, the study aims to explore how Nigeria can enhance women's representation through the implementation of more effective gender-sensitive policies and reforms within political parties and electoral systems. It also provides a framework for understanding the barriers to female political participation in Nigeria and offers potential pathways for overcoming them, highlighting the need for structural changes to ensure equal political opportunities for women.

2.4.2 Critical Mass Theory

Critical Mass Theory, developed by Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977), asserts that in order for women to effectively influence decision-making processes in political institutions, they must reach a critical threshold of representation commonly cited as around 30%. Kanter's theory suggests that when women represent at least 30% of a decision-making body, they can exert meaningful influence and shift the institutional culture, advocating for policies and practices that reflect their needs and perspectives. In the context of Nigeria, where women's political representation remains below 10%, this theory highlights the importance of increasing female participation in legislative and executive bodies to create the critical mass necessary for meaningful change. The theory suggests that without achieving this threshold, women's influence will remain marginal, and their voices will continue to be overshadowed by male-dominated political structures.

Critical Mass Theory is particularly relevant to Nigeria's political landscape, where the underrepresentation of women in key political positions has hindered their ability to shape policy and governance effectively. With fewer than 10% of women holding elective or appointive political offices, the theory suggests that Nigeria's political system would benefit from increased female participation, which could lead to more gender-sensitive policies and reforms. The presence of a critical mass of women in political offices would not only help in advocating for women's rights and gender equality but could also foster broader societal change by challenging the deeply rooted patriarchal norms that dominate the political arena.

However, Critical Mass Theory has been critiqued for its focus on numeric representation, suggesting that simply achieving a certain percentage of women in decision-making positions is not sufficient. Critics argue that the quality of women's participation and their ability to effect change depend on various factors, including the level of political power, support from male

counterparts, and the institutional environment. In some cases, even when women reach the critical mass, they may still struggle to exercise their influence due to entrenched political cultures and resistance from male-dominated structures (Kanter, 1977).

Additionally, the theory does not fully account for the diverse backgrounds and experiences of women, which can affect their ability to collectively influence decision-making, especially in a highly fragmented society like Nigeria. Despite these critiques, Critical Mass Theory is highly applicable to this study, as it provides a framework for understanding the impact of female representation in Nigeria's political system. By emphasizing the importance of reaching a critical mass of women in legislative and executive bodies, the theory supports the idea that gender parity in political representation can lead to more inclusive decision-making processes. This theory is useful for examining how systemic inequality and underrepresentation of women in Nigeria can be addressed through institutional reforms, such as gender quotas, affirmative action policies, and other strategies aimed at increasing women's political participation. Ultimately, Critical Mass Theory highlights the need for Nigeria to focus on strategies that increase the number of women in politics, thus creating a more equitable political environment and ensuring that women's voices are heard and considered in the policymaking process.

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CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on secondary data analysis. The purpose is to systematically examine existing scholarly literature, government reports, policy documents, electoral statistics, and international agency publications to understand the challenges hindering women's political representation in Nigeria and the opportunities for improvement. This design is suitable for exploratory studies where data has already been collected and documented by credible sources (Creswell, 2018).

3.2 Sources of Data

Data for this study were obtained from a diverse range of secondary sources, including academic journals and books on gender and political studies accessed through platforms such as JSTOR and Google Scholar. Official reports from key Nigerian institutions, including the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), National Population Commission (NPC), and the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, provided valuable insights into the current state of women's political participation.

Additionally, policy documents like the National Gender Policy (2006, revised 2021) were examined to understand the framework and commitment to gender equality within Nigeria's governance structures. International reports from organizations such as UN Women, USAID, and other development partners offered a broader perspective on gender equality and political participation. Media articles and press statements related to the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria were also included to provide context on recent political events and their impact on women's involvement in politics. These sources were selected based on their relevance to the study, recency (2015–2024), and credibility in addressing gender issues within the Nigerian political context.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The data collection process involved identifying, reviewing, and synthesizing peer-reviewed articles, official statistics, and relevant policy papers. Search keywords included: women in Nigerian politics, gender and governance, affirmative action in Nigeria, INEC election results, and patriarchy in political participation. The analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis, which allowed for the identification of recurring patterns, concepts, and frameworks relevant to the research objectives. The data were grouped into major themes, including structural barriers, socio-cultural constraints, economic challenges, and policy frameworks. Key opportunities and success stories were also noted.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyzes the data collected for the study on women's political participation in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024. The data were gathered from secondary sources, including academic journals, government reports, policy documents, media articles, and international reports, to assess the factors affecting women's involvement in the political process and the implementation of gender-inclusive policies. This chapter aims to provide a detailed examination of these factors, identify trends in women's representation in political offices, and explore the effectiveness of interventions aimed at improving gender equality in Nigerian politics. The data presentation is organized around key themes that emerged from the secondary sources, including barriers to political participation, policy initiatives, and case studies of successful female politicians.

4.2 Results and Discussion

i. The socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers affecting women's political participation in Nigeria

Women in Nigeria face a range of socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers that significantly impede their political participation. Socio-culturally, Nigeria is deeply influenced by patriarchal values, particularly in the northern regions, where traditional beliefs often relegate women to domestic roles and exclude them from public and political spheres. In many parts of Northern Nigeria, societal expectations limit women's visibility in the public sphere, thereby excluding them from political discourse (Adamu, 2020). This cultural perception of leadership as a male domain limits women's involvement in politics, with leadership roles often considered inappropriate for women. Religious factors also reinforce these gendered roles, especially in Northern Nigeria, where conservative interpretations of religious doctrines can further restrict women's public engagement (Chukwuemeka & Agbara, 2018). In the southern parts of the country, although women may have slightly more visibility, traditional gender roles still limit their participation in political processes, as women are often expected to prioritize family and domestic duties over political involvement.

Economically, the barriers are equally daunting. Politics in Nigeria is heavily financially driven, and the costs associated with campaigning, including nomination fees and the expenses required to mobilize supporters, make it difficult for many women to compete. For example, the high cost of nomination forms for political office, which can run into millions of naira, often excludes women from contesting in elections (Arowolo & Aluko, 2020). Financial support networks and resources, which are crucial for successful political campaigns, are often inaccessible to women, leaving them at a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts. Women are also underrepresented in the business and political circles that are key to securing political financing, thus further deepening the gender gap in political participation. The lack of economic resources to run competitive campaigns limits the pool of women able to break into political office, as political participation in Nigeria is largely shaped by financial capability (Yusuf, 2017).

Institutionally, political parties in Nigeria are largely male-dominated, and the processes for selecting candidates are often skewed against women. Women are frequently marginalized in party leadership and decision-making positions, which further limits their opportunities to run for office (Arowolo & Aluko, 2020). For instance, political parties often prioritize male candidates in winnable seats, and women are relegated to less influential positions or are excluded from the political party machinery altogether. Despite Nigeria's international commitments to gender equality through frameworks like CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and the Beijing Platform for Action, the implementation of gender-sensitive policies has been weak.

The repeated failure to pass the Gender Equality Bill in the National Assembly is a clear example of institutional resistance to enacting changes that would support women's political participation (Ezeilo, 2021). Furthermore, the political environment in Nigeria is often marked by violence and intimidation, which disproportionately affects women, making it even harder for them to pursue political careers. During the 2019 elections, women faced threats of physical violence and harassment, with many retreating from the political scene due to safety concerns (Chukwuemeka & Agbara, 2018).

ii. The role of political parties and electoral processes in limiting or promoting female representation

Political parties and electoral processes play a pivotal role in either promoting or hindering female representation in Nigeria's political landscape. Despite the increasing number of women aspiring to political office, Nigerian political parties, which serve as gatekeepers to power, often marginalize women through male-dominated structures and candidate selection processes. Women seeking political office are frequently subjected to exclusion, with political parties prioritizing male candidates, particularly for winnable positions, while relegating women to less influential roles. The high financial cost associated with securing party tickets and running a campaign further exacerbates this issue, as women often lack the financial resources necessary to compete effectively (Arowolo & Aluko, 2020).

In addition, electoral processes in Nigeria remain heavily influenced by patronage networks that favor male candidates, and women often lack access to these critical political alliances. The failure to implement gender-sensitive electoral reforms, such as gender quotas or affirmative action policies, has left the system largely unresponsive to the needs of female candidates (Ezeilo, 2021). Furthermore, women face the added challenge of electoral violence and harassment, especially in politically volatile regions, which makes their participation even more difficult (Chukwuemeka & Agbara, 2018). However, some political parties and civil society organizations are taking steps to address these issues, advocating for policies that support women's political participation. Despite these efforts, the structural barriers women face within political parties and the electoral process continue to limit their representation in Nigeria's political sphere.

iii. The effectiveness of existing gender-related policies and legal frameworks.

The effectiveness of existing gender-related policies and legal frameworks in Nigeria is a critical factor in determining the level of women's political participation. While Nigeria has made some strides in acknowledging gender inequality through various policies and international agreements, the implementation and enforcement of these frameworks remain weak, undermining their intended impact. One of the legal frameworks addressing gender equality is the National Gender Policy (2006, revised 2021), which outlines the Nigerian government's commitment to achieving gender equity in all spheres, including politics. The policy advocates for a minimum of 35% women's representation in decision-making positions, including political offices.

However, despite the policy's clear objectives, its implementation has been inconsistent. For instance, the Gender Equality Bill, which aims to provide legal support for gender equality in politics and other areas, has failed to pass in the National Assembly multiple times, largely due to resistance from lawmakers who are reluctant to implement policies that would challenge traditional gender norms (Ezeilo, 2021). The inability to pass this bill has left a significant gap in the legal framework supporting women's political participation, reinforcing the gender disparity in Nigeria's political system.

In addition to the National Gender Policy, Nigeria is a signatory to several international conventions that advocate for gender equality, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. These international agreements place pressure on the Nigerian government to adopt and implement policies that promote gender equality in political participation. However, while Nigeria has made commitments to these international frameworks, the practical impact has been limited. The country's failure to domesticate these global agreements into binding national legislation has resulted in the continued underrepresentation of women in political offices. For example, the absence of quotas for women in elective offices, which has been adopted in several African countries, continues to hinder women's political participation in Nigeria (Adamu, 2020).

Furthermore, political parties, as key players in the political system, have failed to adopt and implement policies that promote gender equality in their candidate selection processes. Although some political parties have made minor attempts to increase the number of women in leadership roles, these efforts are often insufficient, and gender-sensitive reforms within the party structure remain weak. For instance, despite the endorsement of gender quotas by civil society organizations and women's groups, political parties have shown little commitment to implementing such quotas, with women still occupying fewer than 10% of political positions in both legislative and executive branches (Arowolo & Aluko, 2020). This lack of commitment to gender parity by political parties undermines the effectiveness of existing policies and legal frameworks.

Another area where legal frameworks fall short is in the implementation of laws against violence and harassment during elections. Women in politics are often subjected to violence, intimidation, and threats, particularly during campaign periods, which discourages them from participating. Although there are laws in place to protect citizens from such violence, the enforcement of these laws is often weak, and female candidates are rarely provided with the security or support needed to protect them from these risks (Chukwuemeka & Agbara, 2018). As a result, women remain vulnerable to violence and harassment, further limiting their ability to participate in the electoral process.

Despite these challenges, there have been some positive developments in terms of gender-related policies and frameworks. For instance, the Electoral Act 2022 includes provisions that encourage the inclusion of women in political parties, although its impact remains to be seen. Additionally, civil society organizations and advocacy groups continue to push for stronger policies and legal reforms to ensure gender equality in politics. These efforts have led to some progress, such as the increased number of women nominated for political positions in certain states and the rising awareness of gender issues in politics. However, the overall impact of these reforms is still limited by the lack of comprehensive enforcement mechanisms and the entrenched cultural and institutional barriers that women face.

iv. Opportunities and strategies for enhancing women's political inclusion in Nigeria, it is crucial

The Nigerian government must institutionalize legislated gender quotas to guarantee a minimum percentage of female representation in elective and appointive positions. This has been effective in countries like Rwanda and Senegal, where such legal provisions have led to significant increases in women's political participation (Tripp & Kang, 2008; Bauer, 2021). Nigeria's National Gender Policy, which recommends a 35% affirmative action benchmark, must be fully implemented and backed by enforceable legislation (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2021).

Additionally, political parties must reform their internal processes by adopting gender-sensitive policies that prioritize women for leadership and winnable positions. Capacity-building programs, political mentoring, and campaign finance support for women candidates should be established to level the playing field (Arowolo & Aluko, 2020). Civil society organizations and development partners can support advocacy efforts and provide training to prepare women for political leadership.

Furthermore, public awareness campaigns must challenge patriarchal norms and promote a culture of gender equality, particularly at the grassroots level (Chukwuemeka & Agbara, 2018). Creating safe political environments through the enforcement of laws against electoral violence and harassment will also encourage more women to participate. By implementing these strategies, Nigeria can begin to bridge the gender gap in politics and align with global standards of democratic representation.

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CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study investigates the factors influencing women's political participation in Nigeria, with an emphasis on socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers, as well as the role of political parties, electoral processes, and the effectiveness of gender-related policies. Socio-cultural barriers remain a major challenge, particularly in the northern regions, where patriarchal norms limit women's involvement in politics and public life, relegating them to domestic roles (Adamu, 2020). While southern Nigeria may offer more opportunities, traditional gender roles still restrict political engagement (Chukwuemeka & Agbara, 2018).

Economic barriers further hinder women's political participation, as the high costs of campaigning and securing party tickets disproportionately affect women, who often lack the financial resources to compete (Arowolo & Aluko, 2020). This economic disadvantage is compounded by limited access to financial networks that are crucial for successful campaigns (Yusuf, 2017). Institutional barriers within Nigeria's male-dominated political parties also play a significant role in excluding women from political power. The candidate selection process favors men, and women are often sidelined in winnable positions, further marginalizing them in the political arena (Ezeilo, 2021).

Political parties and electoral processes continue to restrict female representation, with women facing fewer opportunities as parties prioritize male candidates and the absence of gender quotas exacerbates the gender gap in politics (Arowolo & Aluko, 2020). Finally, the effectiveness of gender-related policies and legal frameworks remains limited, despite the existence of policies like the National Gender Policy and international agreements on gender equality. Weak enforcement, lack of gender quotas, and the failure to pass the Gender Equality Bill further undermine the impact of these policies (Ezeilo, 2021).

The institutionalization of legislated gender quotas and full implementation of the 35% affirmative action policy are essential to ensure adequate female representation. Political parties must reform internal structures to promote gender-sensitive practices, while women should be supported through leadership training, mentoring, and financial assistance. Civil society and development partners can play vital roles in advocacy and capacity building. Additionally, public education campaigns are necessary to challenge patriarchal norms, and legal protections must be enforced to ensure women's safety in political spaces.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that women's political participation in Nigeria is significantly constrained by socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers. Despite the existence of gender-related policies and frameworks, their impact has been limited due to weak enforcement and resistance to change within political parties and society at large. The financial and institutional challenges, coupled with patriarchal cultural norms, continue to limit women's access to political power, leaving them underrepresented in key political offices.

5.3 Recommendations

Policy implementation and enforcement must be prioritized, ensuring that gender-related policies such as the National Gender Policy are effectively implemented. The Gender Equality Bill should be passed and domesticated into national law, while gender quotas for women in elective offices should be introduced to ensure minimum female representation. The Federal Government and the National Assembly are responsible for ensuring the passage and implementation of these policies. Affirmative action and financial support are also crucial; political parties should adopt policies that prioritize women in leadership roles, and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), along with state governments, should provide financial support and subsidies to reduce the financial burden of campaigning for female candidates.

Additionally, cultural and societal change is essential to challenge patriarchal norms that hinder women's political participation. Engaging community leaders, religious organizations, and civil society groups to promote gender equality and encourage women's political involvement will help shift societal attitudes. Political party reforms are also necessary to ensure gender-sensitive candidate selection processes that provide equal opportunities for women to contest for winnable seats, along with greater female representation in party leadership and decision-making roles. The political parties themselves must ensure these reforms.

Protection and security for women politicians must be prioritized, with measures to safeguard them from violence and harassment during elections. The Nigerian Police Force and INEC should collaborate to ensure a secure environment for female candidates, while law enforcement agencies must be trained to address electoral violence and ensure the safety of women in politics. The government should institutionalize legislated gender quotas by enacting and enforcing laws that mandate a minimum of 35% female representation in elective and appointive positions. This responsibility lies with the National Assembly, in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, to ensure full implementation of the National Gender Policy.

Legal backing for affirmative action must also be provided through enforceable legislation to guarantee consistent compliance across political institutions. Additionally, political parties should reform their internal structures by adopting gender-sensitive policies that prioritize women for leadership and winnable electoral positions. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should monitor party compliance with gender equity standards during candidate nomination processes. Furthermore, civil society organizations, in partnership with development agencies and the National Orientation Agency (NOA), should provide capacity-building programs including leadership training, political mentoring, and campaign strategies to equip women for competitive political participation. The Federal Government, through institutions like the Ministry of Finance and INEC, should also establish special campaign funds or provide financial subsidies to reduce the economic barriers female candidates face. Public awareness campaigns led by the National Orientation Agency, religious and traditional leaders, and the media should be intensified to challenge harmful gender stereotypes and promote women's roles in governance, particularly in rural communities.

Lastly, to ensure a safe and inclusive political environment, security agencies and the Nigeria Police Force, under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior, must enforce laws that protect women from electoral violence and harassment. Through

these collaborative efforts, Nigeria can begin to close the gender gap in political representation and meet international democratic standards.

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