

SOCIO-POLITICAL BARRIERS AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Women's political participation in Nigeria remains notably low despite efforts to promote gender equality. This study investigated the socio-political barriers affecting women's political engagement, focusing on gender discrimination, financial constraints, and political violence. Data were collected from 400 women in Abuja using a survey research approach, and correlation analysis was employed to explore the relationships between these barriers and women's political participation. The results showed significant positive correlations between gender discrimination ($r = 0.490, p < .05$), financial constraints ($r = 0.731, p < .05$), and political violence ($r = 0.909, p < .05$) with women's participation. The findings highlight the urgent need to address these barriers to foster a more inclusive political environment. The study recommends strategies such as reducing gender biases, providing financial support for women candidates, and enforcing laws to protect women from political violence to enhance political participation and gender equality in Nigeria.

Keywords: Women's political participation, gender discrimination, financial constraints, political violence, gender equality.

Introduction

Along with support for gender equality and democratic governance, Nigeria still faces an important challenge related to the absence of women in politics. In the National Assembly, women comprised simply 4.17% of the elected representatives in the 2019 elections, down from 5.65% in 2015 (Nwankwo & Okocha, 2020). The accessible data underscore the important nature of the gender inequality in political participation, pointing out the common barriers women deal with in engaging fully in politics.

Both the Nigerian government along with overseas organizations and NGOs have rolled out multiple efforts geared towards making women's political participation more advantageous. In order to explain, the National Gender Policy supports 35% female engagement in political appointments, whilst groups such as the Women in Politics Forum (WIPF) and the African Women Leadership Network (AWLN) deliver necessary resources and training for women interested in pursuing political roles (Ogundipe, 2020). Despite these efforts, the difference between policy and practice is ongoing, since the strong social and political barriers keep women from participating fully in political life.

Gender inequalities, resource scarcity, and political violence are the essential disadvantages. The standard beliefs shaped by culture and society generally perceive women as inadequate leaders, thus causing them to miss political career opportunities (Adamu & Adamu, 2021). Economic pressures, in addition, linked with campaigning, together with restricted access to financial relationships and political patronage systems, hinder women disproportionately, leading to a tricky competition situation (Okonkwo et al., 2022). Challenges are further complicated by political violence. In Nigeria, the irregular nature of politics marked by election violence and threats may scare off women from involvement in politics and potentially danger the security of both female candidates and their supporters (Akinyele, 2020; Ibrahim & Salihu, 2019).

This study attempts to understand how these socio-political barriers obstruct women's political participation in Nigeria by analyzing their functioning. Although earlier research has examined these factors separately, there is an obvious void in the literature about their collective effect. This publication enters the larger debate around gender equality and political empowerment in Nigeria by delivering a detailed analysis of gender discrimination, financial challenges, and political violence.

The findings of the study carry important consequences for policy and practice. Knowing the constraints leads us to enact activities such as financing women candidates, framing initiatives that eliminate gender biases, and preserving rules that help women avoid political violence. In Nigeria, achieving a broader political structure depends on succeeding in the core functionality of these actionable strategies. This research aspires to furnish significant insights for policymakers, scholars, and advocates by closing a topic gap and delivering utilizable recommendations to better the participation of women in politics in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite ongoing efforts to promote gender equality, women in Nigeria remain significantly underrepresented in political spheres. As of the 2023 general elections, women occupy only 3 out of 109 seats (2.7%) in the Senate and 17 out of 360 seats (4.7%) in the House of Representatives, amounting to a mere 4.2% representation in the National Assembly. This underrepresentation highlights the need to address the socio-political barriers hindering women's political participation in Nigeria (Akinyemi, 2023; Onize, 2023).

Gender discrimination remains a pervasive issue rooted in cultural norms and patriarchal structures that traditionally relegate women to subordinate roles. These discriminatory practices limit women's political aspirations and engagement. Although Nigeria has legal frameworks such as the National Gender Policy, which advocates for 35% female representation in political appointments, enforcement remains weak, exacerbating the challenges women face in political contexts (Lampthey, 2022).

Financial constraints further compound the problem. Campaigning for political office requires substantial resources that many women lack. During the 2023 election cycle, women made up only 10% of over 15,000 candidates. The high cost of obtaining nomination forms and running effective campaigns poses a significant barrier to their political ambitions, with many women struggling to secure the necessary funding (Onize, 2023; Akinyemi, 2023).

Moreover, the volatile nature of Nigerian politics, characterized by electoral violence and intimidation, creates a hostile environment for women. The fear of violence and harassment significantly reduces women's willingness to engage in political activities. Reports from the 2023 elections indicate that 43% of female candidates experienced some form of violence or intimidation, further deterring their participation (Onize, 2023; Lamprey, 2022).

This study seeks to examine the relationship between these socio-political barriers and women's political participation in Nigeria. By focusing on gender discrimination, financial constraints, and political violence, this research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the factors that impede women's political empowerment and to contribute to the broader discourse on achieving gender equality in Nigeria's political landscape. To achieve this the study raises the following research questions:

The broad objective of this study was to examine the relationship between socio-political barriers and women's political participation in Nigeria. The specific objectives were:

- i. What is the relationship between gender discrimination and women's political participation in Nigeria?
- ii. What is the relationship between financial constraints and women's political participation in Nigeria?
- iii. What is the relationship between political violence and women's political participation in Nigeria?

Literature Review

Conceptual Review on Women Participation in Politics

Women's participation in politics is a multifaceted concept that involves their active engagement in decision-making processes at various levels of governance. According to Einspahr (2010), political participation refers to activities through which individuals influence or attempt to influence the composition and policies of their government. This includes voting, running for office, and engaging in political discussions. Women's participation is essential for creating inclusive and representative political systems. As highlighted by Blanchfield (2011), increased women's representation in politics is associated with improved governance and more equitable policy outcomes.

The importance of women's political participation cannot be overstated. Women bring unique perspectives and experiences to the political arena, which are crucial for

addressing issues such as gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and family policies (Dolan, 2014). Research shows that higher levels of women's political participation are linked to lower levels of corruption and increased trust in government (Webster, Chen, & Beardsley, 2019). Additionally, women's participation promotes the inclusion of marginalized groups and helps to break down societal stereotypes, fostering a more egalitarian society (UN Women, 2018).

Efforts to increase women's political participation have included the implementation of gender quotas, affirmative action policies, and targeted support programs. These measures aim to address structural barriers and create a level playing field for women in politics. For instance, the UNDP's Gender Social Norms Index underscores the need for dismantling deeply entrenched social norms that hinder women's political engagement (World Economic Forum, 2023). Furthermore, programs that focus on building women's leadership skills and providing mentorship have shown positive impacts on women's political ambition and efficacy (Alodat, Al-Qora'n, & Hamoud, 2023).

Despite these efforts, significant barriers remain. Gender discrimination, financial constraints, and political violence are among the primary socio-economic factors affecting women's political participation in Nigeria. Addressing these barriers requires comprehensive strategies that combine legal reforms, societal change, and support systems for women candidates.

Socio-Economic Factors Affecting Women's Participation in Politics in Nigeria

The participation of women in politics in Nigeria is significantly affected by several socio-economic factors, including gender discrimination, financial constraints, and political violence (Lamptey, 2022; Rasak & Garuba, 2017). These barriers hinder women's ability to engage in the political process, thereby limiting their representation and influence in governance.

(a) Gender Discrimination: Gender discrimination is deeply entrenched in Nigeria's cultural norms and patriarchal structures. These societal norms often assign women to subordinate roles, which significantly limits their political aspirations and engagement. Despite the existence of legal frameworks such as the National Gender Policy, which advocates for 35% female representation in political appointments, the enforcement of these laws remains weak. This weak enforcement exacerbates the challenges faced by women in political contexts, as they continue to encounter significant biases and barriers (Lamptey, 2022).

Moreover, the public perception that women are less capable leaders than men further diminish their participation in politics. Stereotypes and societal expectations discourage women from pursuing political careers and engaging in political activities. According to the World Economic Forum (2023), these perceptions create an environment where women feel undervalued and unsupported, thereby reducing their political ambitions and

engagement. Addressing these deeply rooted gender biases is crucial for enhancing women's political participation in Nigeria.

(b) Financial Constraints: Financial constraints pose a significant barrier to women's political participation in Nigeria. Running for political office requires substantial financial resources, which many women lack. The high cost of campaigning, including obtaining nomination forms and running effective campaigns, significantly limits women's ability to participate in elections. During the 2023 election cycle, women constituted only little of many candidates due to these high campaign costs and limited access to financial networks (Akinyemi, 2023).

This economic disparity is further compounded by the lack of access to financial networks and political patronage systems that predominantly favor male candidates. Many women struggle to secure the necessary funding to run competitive campaigns, which diminishes their chances of success (Onize, 2023). Efforts to provide financial support and create equitable funding opportunities for women candidates are essential to overcoming this barrier and increasing women's political representation.

(c) Political Violence: Political violence and intimidation are critical factors that deter women from participating in politics. The volatile nature of Nigerian politics, characterized by electoral violence and intimidation, creates a hostile environment for women. Reports from the 2023 elections indicate that 43% of female candidates experienced some form of violence or intimidation, further deterring their participation (Onize, 2023).

This environment of fear and violence not only endangers women candidates but also their supporters and families. The threat of physical harm and harassment creates a significant disincentive for women to engage in political activities (Lampsey, 2022; Daniel & Chukwuemeka, 2023). Addressing political violence and ensuring the safety of female candidates and their supporters is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and participatory political environment in Nigeria.

Empirical Reviews

Gender Discrimination and women's political Participation

Idike et al. (2020) investigated the impact of gender discrimination on women's political participation in Nigeria. The study utilized survey data collected from a population of women political aspirants and activists across Nigeria, with a sample size of 500 respondents. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings indicated that gender discrimination, rooted in cultural norms and societal expectations, significantly hinders women's political ambitions and participation. The study concluded that there is a need for robust policy enforcement and societal change to address gender biases and promote gender equality in Nigerian politics.

Luka (2011) examined the imperative of empowerment for enhancing women's political participation in Nigeria. The research employed a mixed-methods approach, surveying a population of women involved in politics and civil society, with a sample size of 400 participants. Quantitative data were analyzed using regression analysis, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Results showed that gender discrimination, particularly in the form of societal and institutional biases, remains a significant barrier to women's political engagement. The study concluded that empowerment initiatives and affirmative actions are crucial for increasing women's political representation in Nigeria.

Okereke (2015) focused on the historical evolution of gender discrimination and its impact on women's political participation in Nigeria. The study involved a qualitative analysis of historical and legal documents, supplemented by interviews with 50 women leaders and politicians. Data were analyzed using content analysis. The findings revealed that entrenched patriarchal norms and legal constraints have historically marginalized women from political processes. The study concluded that systemic reforms and continuous advocacy are necessary to dismantle these long-standing barriers and enhance women's political participation.

Financial Constraints and women's political Participation

Mohammed and Zaid (2014) investigated the financial barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria. The study used a survey method, targeting a population of female political candidates and activists, with a sample size of 300 respondents. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression models. The results indicated that financial constraints, such as high campaign costs and lack of access to funding, significantly limit women's ability to participate in politics. The study concluded that providing financial support and establishing equitable funding mechanisms are essential for increasing women's political engagement.

Nkwede (2016) analyzed the impact of financial constraints on women's participation in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods, surveying 350 female candidates and conducting in-depth interviews with 20 political analysts. Data were analyzed using SPSS for quantitative data and NVivo for qualitative data. The findings showed that financial barriers, including campaign expenses and limited access to financial networks, were major impediments to women's political participation. The study concluded that addressing these financial barriers is crucial for enhancing women's representation in Nigerian politics.

Igbuzor (2014) explored the financial challenges faced by women in Nigerian politics. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design, with a sample size of 400 women involved in political activities. Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The results revealed that financial constraints, such as lack of sponsorship and high nomination fees, significantly deter women from running for office. The study concluded that implementing financial support policies and reducing campaign costs are vital for promoting women's political participation in Nigeria.

Political Violence and women's political Participation

Rasak and Garuba (2017) examined the effects of political violence on women's participation in Nigerian elections. The study used a mixed-methods approach, with a sample size of 500 female voters and candidates from various states. Data were collected through surveys and interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis and descriptive statistics. The findings indicated that political violence, including threats and physical attacks, significantly discourages women from participating in politics. The study concluded that ensuring the safety and security of women in political processes is essential for increasing their participation.

Kehinde David (2018) assessed the impact of electoral violence on women's political engagement in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The study involved a survey of 600 women politicians and voters, with data analyzed using logistic regression and thematic analysis. The results showed that the fear of violence and actual incidents of electoral violence were major deterrents to women's political participation. The study concluded that comprehensive measures to prevent political violence and protect female candidates are necessary for enhancing women's political engagement.

Nkwede (2016) investigated the ramifications of political developments and electoral violence on women's political participation in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The study utilized qualitative methods, including focus group discussions and interviews with 100 women involved in politics. Data were analyzed using content analysis. The findings revealed that political violence and intimidation were significant barriers to women's political participation. The study concluded that creating a peaceful and supportive political environment is critical for encouraging more women to engage in politics.

Theoretical Framework

Gender and Development (GAD) theory

The Gender and Development (GAD) theory, developed by Caroline Moser in 1993, emphasizes the role of gender relations in development processes. It assumes that gender inequality stems from social, economic, and political structures that disadvantage women. The theory focuses on both the practical and strategic needs of women (Momsen, 2019). Practical needs are related to immediate and basic needs, such as income and employment, while strategic needs are related to long-term empowerment and social change, such as legal rights and political participation. The GAD approach seeks to address both types of needs to achieve gender equality and empower women.

The Gender and Development theory is particularly suitable for this study as it provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the socio-economic factors affecting women's political participation in Abuja, Nigeria. By applying GAD, the study can explore how gender discrimination, financial constraints, and political violence interact with broader social, economic, and political structures to limit women's political involvement. This approach helps to identify both immediate needs (e.g., financial support for

campaigns) and strategic needs (e.g., legal reforms to protect women from political violence) essential for enhancing women's political participation. The theory's emphasis on structural change aligns with the study's goal of addressing the underlying barriers to women's political empowerment (Bradshaw, Chant, & Linneker, 2017).

Methodology

This study employed a correlational survey research design, facilitating a comprehensive examination of the socio-political factors influencing women's political participation in Abuja. The target population were women in Abuja who have voting rights. According to the National Population Commission of Nigeria, Abuja's population is estimated at approximately 3.6 million as of 2023, encompassing women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds across different districts. To ensure statistical validity, a sample size of 400 respondents was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's table. This sample size was further justified by considering practical constraints, such as time and available resources, while ensuring enough statistical power to detect meaningful relationships. To enhance representativeness, a stratified sampling technique was employed, with participants categorized according to their district within Abuja. This method allowed the study to capture a wide range of experiences, ensuring that different socio-economic perspectives were adequately represented in the analysis of political participation.

The key variables—gender discrimination, financial constraints, and political violence—were operationalized through structured questions using Likert scales, allowing for clear measurement of each factor. For instance, gender discrimination was assessed by respondents' perceptions of societal and institutional biases, while financial constraints and political violence were measured by questions related to access to resources and exposure to intimidation, respectively. To address potential biases like social desirability bias, the questionnaire was administered anonymously, and participants were reassured of confidentiality, encouraging honest responses. The reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.76 to 0.82, and content validity was established through expert reviews. Data were analyzed using Pearson product-moment correlation via SPSS, ensuring a robust evaluation of relationships between variables while checking assumptions to enhance the accuracy of results. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were rigorously upheld to ensure the study's integrity. For data analysis, Pearson product-moment correlation was used to examine the relationships between the independent variables—gender discrimination, financial constraints, and political violence—and the dependent variable, women's political participation. SPSS version 24 software was utilized to perform the statistical analyses, ensuring robustness and precision in the results. The choice of correlation was justified due to its capability to assess the relationship of multiple factors and women's political participation.

Result and Discussion

The demographic data collected from women eligible to vote within Abuja, Nigeria, provide valuable insights into the study population's characteristics. Analysis of gender

status indicates that out of the 384 respondents, all were female as they represent the target population of the study. Regarding age distribution, the majority of respondents fell within the 20-30 age bracket, accounting for 50.8%, followed by 31-40 (31.6%), 41-50 (11.9%), and 51-60 (5.6%) age groups. Concerning educational qualifications, the data shows that the majority of respondents possessed ND/NCE qualifications (61.6%), followed by BSc (18.6%), O'LEVEL (18.1%), and a smaller proportion with Master and other qualifications (1.7%). Furthermore, analysis of the length of service among employees reveals that a significant proportion (45.8%) had served in their respective organizations for 6-10 years, followed by 11-15 years (23.2%), 1-5 years (13.6%), 16-20 years (13.6%), and 21 years and above (4.0%).

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between gender discrimination and women's political participation in Abuja, Nigeria.

Table 1: Correlations

	Women's Participation	Political Gender Discrimination
Women's Political Participation	Pearson Correlation	1
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
N	384	384
Gender Discrimination	Pearson Correlation	0.490**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
N	384	384

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis in Table 1 gives a significant positive relationship between gender discrimination and women's political participation in Abuja, Nigeria, $r = 0.490^{**}$, $p = 0.000$. Since the p-value is less than 0.05 ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$), the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This indicates a positive relationship between gender discrimination and women's political participation in Abuja, Nigeria. The coefficient of determination (R^2) which is 24%, suggests that gender discrimination accounts for a significant variance in women's political participation. This finding implies that reducing gender discrimination could improve women's engagement in political activities. This is in line with the finding of Okereke (2015), which findings revealed that entrenched patriarchal norms and legal constraints have historically marginalized women from political processes

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between financial constraints and women's political participation in Abuja, Nigeria.

Table 2: Correlations

	Women's Political Participation	Political Financial Constraints
Women's Political Participation	Pearson Correlation	1
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
N	384	384
Financial Constraints	Pearson Correlation	0.731**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
N	384	384

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis in Table 2 shows a significant high positive relationship between financial constraints and women's political participation in Abuja, Nigeria, $r = 0.731^{**}$, $p = 0.000$. Since the p-value is less than 0.05 ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$), the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This suggests a significant positive relationship between financial constraints and women's political participation in Abuja, Nigeria. The coefficient of determination (R^2) which is 53.4%, indicates that financial constraints considerably impact women's political engagement. This finding underscores the importance of addressing financial barriers to enhance women's participation in politics. This in line with the findings of Nkwede (2016) The findings showed that financial barriers, including campaign expenses and limited access to financial networks, were major impediments to women's political participation

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between political violence and women's political participation in Abuja, Nigeria.

Table 3: Correlations

	Women's Political Participation	Political Violence
Women's Political Participation	Pearson Correlation	1
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
N	384	384
Political Violence	Pearson Correlation	0.909**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
N	384	384

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis in Table 2 gives a significant positive relationship between political violence and women's political participation in Abuja, Nigeria $r = 0.909^{**}$, $p = 0.000$. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the

alternative hypothesis is accepted. This indicates a significant positive relationship between political violence and women's political participation in Abuja, Nigeria. The coefficient of determination (R^2) which is 82.6%, suggests that political violence profoundly affects women's participation in politics. This result implies that mitigating political violence is crucial for improving women's political engagement. Rasak and Garuba (2017) who found that political violence, including threats and physical attacks, significantly discourages women from participating in politics.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study underscores the profound impact of gender discrimination, financial constraints, and political violence on women's political participation in Abuja, Nigeria, with strong correlations for gender discrimination ($r = 0.490$), financial constraints ($r = 0.731$), and political violence ($r = 0.909$). These findings highlight the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to dismantle these barriers, which are deeply embedded in Nigeria's socio-economic and cultural context. Gender discrimination is rooted in patriarchal norms and societal expectations that limit women's roles, while financial constraints are exacerbated by limited access to economic resources and political networks, predominantly controlled by male elites. Political violence, often intertwined with broader issues of insecurity and power struggles, further marginalizes women from political participation. To effectively address these challenges, it is crucial to consider Nigeria's cultural norms, economic disparities, and security issues when designing interventions. These efforts are essential not only for promoting gender equality but also for creating a more inclusive political landscape that improves governance by incorporating diverse perspectives. The following recommendations were made for policy makers:

- i. Implement targeted policies and programs designed to challenge and reduce gender biases and stereotypes in politics. Training and public awareness campaigns can play a crucial role in changing societal attitudes and increasing support for women's political participation. These initiatives should focus on both men and women, promoting inclusivity and equality in leadership roles.
- ii. Provide equitable funding opportunities for women political aspirants. This could include the establishment of grants, sponsorships, and low-interest loan programs specifically for female candidates. By addressing the financial constraints that currently hinder women's participation, these mechanisms will enable women to compete more effectively in elections.
- iii. Develop and rigorously enforce laws aimed at protecting women from political violence and ensuring their safety throughout the electoral process. Establishing secure environments for women candidates and voters, including strong legal frameworks and dedicated security forces during elections, is essential for safeguarding their participation and encouraging more women to engage in politics.

Limitation of the Study

The study acknowledges certain limitations, including the potential for response bias, as participants might have been inclined to provide socially desirable responses. To mitigate this, anonymity was assured, and participants were encouraged to answer truthfully. Additionally, ethical considerations were carefully addressed, with informed consent obtained from all respondents, and confidentiality maintained throughout the study. The research adhered to the institution's ethical guidelines, ensuring compliance with standards for data protection and participant safety.

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