

**EXPLORING FEMINISM AND THE DECLINE OF WOMEN'S
PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIAN POLITICS**

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CERTIFICATION

We the undersigned, hereby certify that this research work was carried out by **Oghenerukevwe Divine AKPOROKAH** with Matriculation Number: **SSC2105652** of the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Award of Bachelor of Science Degree (B.Sc.) in Political Science.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to God Almighty, the Alpha and Omega.

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The researcher would like to express his heartfelt gratitude to God for His unwavering love and guidance, which have been instrumental in the successful completion of this project. God's presence has provided him with strength and inspiration during challenging times, and he is truly thankful for the blessings that have accompanied this academic journey.

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ABSTRACT

This study, titled Exploring Feminism and the Decline of Women's Participation in Nigerian Politics, investigates the systemic and historical factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in Nigerian political leadership, despite their significant demographic presence. Utilizing a feminist theoretical framework, the research examines the interplay of patriarchy, colonial legacies, and socio-cultural barriers that have marginalized women since Nigeria's independence in 1960. Despite constitutional guarantees of non-discrimination and international commitments like the Maputo Protocol, women occupy only 5.2% of seats in the National Assembly as of 2023, with only 381 female candidates among 4,259 in the 2023 elections. Conducted in Ovia North East Local Government Area, Edo State, the study employed a survey research design with a sample of 120 respondents, using a structured questionnaire analyzed via SPSS for frequency and percentage distributions. Findings reveal low social acceptance of women's political roles, with women constituting about 60% of the electorate but holding less than 20% of political offices. Historical data indicate a shift from pre-colonial gender balance to post-colonial patriarchal entrenchment, with challenges including inadequate knowledge of political rights (71.67% agreement), family responsibilities (74.17%), cultural stereotypes (64.17%), financial constraints (74.16%), and gender inequality (65%). Proposed measures to enhance participation include eliminating discrimination (77.5%), ensuring equal opportunities (85%), creating harassment-free environments (76.67%), empowering women through human resource development (80.84%), and building NGO coalitions (84.16%). The study aligns with existing literature highlighting patriarchy and resource gaps as key barriers while recommending policy reforms, economic empowerment, and advocacy to achieve gender parity in Nigerian politics. This research contributes to feminist discourse and provides actionable insights for policymakers, civil society, and stakeholders to foster inclusive governance and advance gender equality in Nigeria.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Women make up more than fifty percent (50%) of the world's population, yet they are consistently underrepresented as voters, political leaders and elected officials and have only attained 15% political representation (Olubela and Afolabi, 2023). Only 12 countries reserved one-third of the parliamentary seats for women. The extent of women's participation in politics and women's access to decision-making can be seen as the key indicators of gender equality in society. Gender equality in decision-making is to be viewed in the context of whether women are in the position to make or influence public decisions on the same footing as men. A politician's task is to ensure public representation and protection of the interests of his/her voters and certain regional, ethnic, religious, or socio-demographic groups. The limited participation of women in political and decision-making processes poses a serious challenge to democracy since over 50% of the citizenry is de facto excluded from public affairs. Thus, the interests of this excluded group, namely women, cannot be adequately represented in decision-making processes (Olubela and Afolabi, 2023).

Twenty-six years after democratization, women remain marginalized and under-represented in political leadership positions in Nigeria. Despite international efforts to increase their engagement with and participation in electoral politics as a fundamental human right, a cornerstone of modern democracy, and a step towards political diversity and inclusion that benefits women, governance, and society, Nigerian women are largely excluded from mainstream political leadership (Shreeves and Boland, 2021). Although participation is constitutionally guaranteed through universal adult suffrage enshrined in the 1979 and 1999 constitutions, and ratified in the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol), in practice, women's presence in and representation at decision-making level is not only marginal but also inadequate. Women are

significantly outnumbered by men in political offices at national, state and local government spaces, although they constitute about half the polling population of over 90 million registered voters (INEC, 2023). The few women in political offices are mostly special appointees to oversee ministries of women's affairs and/or social development.

There exists a systemic exclusion of women and minority groups in Nigeria's politics, which has contributed to the political and social upheavals in the country. Political exclusion is not a new discourse in Nigeria's political space, it started as early as 1954, the year that marked the first-ever elections in the country and since then, women and minority groups such as the physically challenged people have remained underrepresented in both elective and appointive positions. Nigeria's independence in 1960 presented an ample opportunity to correct some of these anomalies introduced by colonialism like the divide-and-rule system, but regrettably, the trend continued as the nationalists who controlled politics at the time struggled to provide effective leadership that addressed critical national political challenges.

Nigeria since independence in 1960 has remained fragmented and characterized by instabilities and inequality. The instabilities are to a large extent the effects of many years of marginalization and political exclusion, especially of minority and vulnerable groups such as women, the physically challenged and ethnic minorities from the mainstream of governance (Tribuneonline.com, 2021). In principle, it appears that the country is projecting democracy and inclusive governance, but in practice, the principles that underpin democracy are grossly lacking. From inception, women have always been politically relegated, because extant laws, religion and cultural beliefs are systematically and socially constructed to favour the men's folk (Nish and Vezhaventhan, 2018). Nigeria can be described as a patriarchal society, where women at best become wives and are not valued as assets in leadership and nation-building processes. Any attempt by women to dare pursue careers or political aspirations often attracts societal condemnation, name-calling, stigma and family resistance (DW Documentary, 2021). Hence, a low representation of women in Nigerian politics.

Nigeria before colonialism was a balanced society where both men and women operated as equals. On the home front, both genders played their roles without interference from anyone. Politically, Nigerian society before colonialism was designed to accommodate males and females with each respecting the other, thereby creating harmony in the society. In that era, women owned lands, and slaves and were sufficiently involved in governance through the age-grade system, village socio-cultural groups and family unions known as *umunna* or *umuada*. It was this sense of equality between men and women in the pre-colonial days that gave impetus to the Aba Women riot of 1929 (Enyioko, 2021). This riot was a protest from women against the imposition of tax by the colonial masters. It was the female folks who organized and implemented the protest without recourse to the men. There were also instances where the women led warriors to victory such as Queen Hangbe of Benin kingdom. All these demonstrated equalities in Nigerian society before the European invasion, which suggests that women had equal opportunities to lead.

However, the Nigerian social structures began to change during their contact with Europeans, more effectively within the colonial era. The relegation and subjugation of women in Africa started when colonial masters who operated large plantations forced the men to work on the farm while the women were required to either stay at home or provide menial services like selling hot drinks to the workers or providing free sex.

Sadie (2020) argues that slow progress in increasing women's inclusion in political leadership is an enduring pattern in Nigeria. This disproportionate under-representation has a long history and continues to linger even after democratization in 1999. That year, at the Federal House of Representatives, only 12 of the elected 360 parliamentarians were women; 17 in 2003; 25 in 2007; 24 in 2011; 20 in 2015; 11 in 2019; and only 14 in 2023 (IPU 2024).

Women's representation in the Senate is equally low. In 1999 and 2003, only three of the 109 elected senators were women. The number increased to nine in 2011, decreased to seven in 2015, and rose again to 11 in 2019, and 4 in 2023 (IPU 2024). Currently, in both houses of parliament, there are only 18 female parliamentarians (5.2%) out of 469 lawmakers (INEC 2023). The picture is

equally bleak in state houses of assemblies. Therefore, Nigeria is ranked 125 out of 146 nations on the global league table of women in parliament (WEF 2024). This is in stark contrast to some African nations (Liberia, Gabon, Malawi, Mauritius, and Tanzania) where women have served as presidents and in other top political positions (Nkereuwem 2023).

The existing literature on women's political marginalization has focused significantly on patriarchy as the main barrier to inclusion (Kelly 2019; Oluyemi 2016; Dosekun 2020). Agunbiade (2020) traced its modern history to 1922 when elective representation was first introduced in Lagos and Calabar. Nigerian men, acting on the colonial government's directive, used the newly formed Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), led by Herbert Macaulay, to establish their growing influence in the Lagos Council. This gave men a 70-year head start before the first woman was elected into parliament in 1979. Therefore, this study seeks to explore feminism and the decline of women's participation in Nigerian politics, examining the perceived social acceptance of women's participation in Nigerian politics, the perceived historical status of women's participation in Nigerian politics, major challenges of women's participation in Nigerian politics, and measures to enhance women participation in Nigerian politics.

1.2 Statement of Research Problem

Women's equal participation in politics is a crucial step towards achieving gender equality, the SDGs, and progress for all. It is not only empowering for the women engaged, but benefits their communities, countries, and the world. Closing the gender gap by ensuring women's right to political participation requires cross-cutting approaches to national and local issues and specific actions from key institutions.

Problem and the decline of women's participation in Nigerian politics in developing democracies like Nigeria, electoral bodies have no data on registered voters and votes cast based on gender. The availability of such data will enable people to know the voting strength of women and the level of their participation in democratic processes. It has been observed that the electoral

body in Nigeria started keeping data based on gender during the 2023 General Elections: data based on registered voters, voter turnout to cast ballots and candidates who contested elective positions at different levels of government. Before the 2023 general elections, however, the data kept by the electoral commission in Nigeria was only for registered voters based on their gender. There was no statistical breakdown based on the gender of the electorate who cast their ballots at the elections conducted from 1999-2023. It has been observed that one of the major problems of electoral bodies in underdeveloped countries is the absence of data which would be useful in determining the extent of gender differences in political participation and the voting patterns of each gender (Ballington, Bardall, Palmieri, and Sullivan 2015). Such gender-aggregated data is important in tracking women's development in politics because, in Nigeria and other parts of Africa, there is poor visibility of women's participation in politics.

This is based on the dominant notion in Nigeria that women's overall marginalization, even under globalization, is rooted in patriarchy. Patriarchy is indeed a fundamental cause of discriminatory practices that are directed at women whether in the economic or political sphere. These discriminatory processes often seek justification for women's assumed biological inferiority to men (Olurode, 2013).

Most of the literature on women's participation in political affairs and the democratic process has been focused on external impediments that prevent their visibility in political processes and winning electoral contests. These impediments are socio-cultural practices that regard women as culturally and socially incapable of leading and being entrusted with political Leadership. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) conducted a global survey of Women's Organizations in 29 countries across the world where both males and females were sampled for the study. The outcome of the survey attributed cultural beliefs/social attitudes/patriarchal mentality as the main obstacle to the advancement of the political status of women (Huber, Kammerud 2017). The work of Huber and Kammerud has identified some factors: beliefs, attitudes, and patriarchal mentality as barriers to women's

political advancement. The work has not explained why in countries where there were female candidates and a substantial number of registered female voters who cast their ballot on election day, the vote was not in favor of female candidates. This is because the poor performance of female candidates in elections is beyond male dominance, and cultural and religious beliefs are the factors predominantly attributed to most studies on women's participation in politics, particularly in developing countries. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate feminism and the decline of women's participation in Nigerian politics, critically examining the perceived social acceptance of women's participation in Nigerian politics, the perceived historical status of women's participation in Nigerian politics, major challenges or women's participation in Nigerian politics, and measures to enhance women participation in Nigerian politics.

1.3 Research Questions

The study will attempt to provide answers to the following questions.

- i. What is the perceived social acceptance of women's participation in Nigerian politics?
- ii. What is the perceived historical status of women's participation in Nigerian politics?
- iii. What are the major challenges to women's participation in Nigerian politics?
- iv. What measures would enhance women's participation in Nigerian politics?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to investigate feminism and the decline of women's participation in Nigerian politics. The specific objectives of the study are

- i. Examine the perceived social acceptance of women's participation in Nigerian politics.
- ii. Identify the perceived historical status of women's participation in Nigerian politics.

- iii. Determine the major challenges to women's participation in Nigerian politics.
- iv. Find measures that can enhance women's participation in Nigerian politics.

1.5 Scope of the study

The scope of the study is to explore feminism and the decline of women's participation in Nigerian politics. The study will be limited to Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study's findings will inform policy and practice related to promoting gender equality and increasing women's participation in politics. The study's results will empower women to participate more effectively in politics and decision-making processes. The study's findings will promote more inclusive and equitable politics in Nigeria, contributing to the development of a more just and democratic society. This study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on feminism and women's participation in politics, particularly in the Nigerian context. The study will benefit prospective researchers as it will serve as a source of reference point to them. Future researchers will use the results of this study to add to existing knowledge. The study will help to open new avenues of research, allowing researchers to delve deeper into the topic under discussion.

1.7 Operational Definition of Terms

Feminism

Feminism refers to the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of the equality of the sexes. It aims to promote equal opportunities, treatment, and rights for women in various aspects of life, including politics, the economy, and society.

Women's Participation in Politics

Women's participation in politics refers to the involvement of women in political activities, such as voting, running for office, and holding public office. It encompasses various forms of political engagement, including activism, advocacy, and leadership.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy refers to a social system in which men hold primary power and authority, often resulting in the marginalization and oppression of women. In the context of Nigerian politics, patriarchy can limit women's opportunities for political participation and leadership.

Gender Equality

Gender equality refers to the state of equal rights, opportunities, and treatment for men and women. It aims to promote fairness and justice in various aspects of life, including politics, economy, and society.

Nigerian Politics

Nigerian politics refers to the political system and processes in Nigeria, including the structures, institutions, and actors that shape the country's governance and decision-making.

Decline of Women's Participation

The decline of women's participation in Nigerian politics refers to the decrease in the number of women involved in political activities, such as voting, running for office, and holding public office. This decline can be attributed to various

factors, including societal norms, economic constraints, and patriarchal dominance.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Introduction

This chapter espoused conceptual discourse on Politics, Political Participation, The 1999 Constitution and the Place of Women in Nigerian politics. The chapter also critically examined the statistics of women in the 2023 election, challenges against women's active participation in politics, societal barriers to women's representation in politics and amelioration of women's involvement and participation in Nigerian politics.

2.1 Conceptual Discourse on Politics

The concept of politics has been viewed from diverse perspectives by scholars who have written on the subject matter. Some scholars noted that esteemed authorities cannot agree on what the subject matter is all about. Consequently, the term politics has been defined in diverse ways. As a result, the term "politics" has been defined in numerous ways. Harold Lasswell, for instance, conceptualizes politics as "Who gets What, When and How?" (Lasswell, 1936),

emphasizing the distribution of power and resources among individuals in authority or those capable of influencing decision-makers. Similarly, George Kousolas (1981, cited in Olu-Adeyemi, 2013) narrows the focus of politics to the State and its institutions, defining it as "those activities that are closely related to the State and its structure of government" (Kousolas, 1975:4, cited in Olu-Adeyemi, 2013). Conversely, David Easton views politics from the standpoint of resource and value allocation, defining it as "the authoritative allocation of values" (Easton, 1965:50, cited in Olu-Adeyemi, 2013). However, it's worth noting that these differing definitions and viewpoints on politics can be reconciled by synthesizing them to propose that politics is the conscious endeavour to influence the thoughts and resources of individuals and nations.

2.2 Conceptual Discourse on Political Participation

Aanghera, (2005) defines political participation as the active engagement by individuals and groups with the governmental processes that affect their lives. This encompasses both involvements in decision-making and acts of opposition. The essence of political participation in any society, either civilised or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and dispensing of power to organise society, harness and distribute resources and influence decision-making in line with organised or individual interests (Arowolo and Abe, 2008).

2.3 The 1999 Constitution and the Place of Women in Nigeria Politics

Since the transition to democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999, there have been many; campaigns, both by governments and different organizations, both locally and internationally, in the deployment of more women involvement, but regardless of the growth made in the last century, there are still few women leaders. It is appalling to note that the right of every citizen of Nigeria, women participation, to vote and to be voted for specified in Sections 40, 42(1), 77(1 & 2) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has been twisted against the women (FGN, 1999). The 2007 election demonstrates that less than 10 per cent of the elected Senate are women, less than 10 per cent of the House of Representatives are women, and no women governors nor presidents.

The right to democratic governance is a prerogative conferred on all citizens by law. The Nigerian 1999 constitution as revised stipulated this privilege very evidently in section 40 thus: Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate with other persons, and in particular, he may form or belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of his interests: provided that the provisions of this section shall not derogate from the powers conferred by this constitution on the Independent National Electoral Commission concerning political parties to which that commission does not accord recognition.

Correspondingly, section 42(1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) stated inter alia that A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person be subjected to any form of discrimination. The above extracts demonstrate that any man or woman can go to court to pursue justice if his or her right to the franchise is being desecrated and that the Constitution in its wholeness proscribes discrimination of any sort on the account of sex or otherwise. The discussion portrays that the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which unquestionably is the reference point for social co-existence amongst clusters and persons has not by any means discriminated against anybody, man or woman in the socio-political scheme of things. It is thus unwarrantable for men to decide to control the Nigerian political scene and henceforth, exclude women who are willing to get involved.

2.4 Statistics of Women in the 2023 Election

Current statistics have shown that there is a paltry 11.2 per cent of female membership in both chambers of the Ninth National Assembly (seven females in the Senate and eleven in the House of Representatives), while in another report by the Women in Politics Forum (WIPF) titled: “Research on Interrogating the Policy Interventions to Increase Women’s Participation in Governance in Nigeria,” there were only 381 women among the total of 4,259 contestants for the presidential and the National Assembly seat in the year 2023 polls (Osigbodi, 2024).

The report revealed that the development indicated the continuous marginalisation of women in the nation's political space; noting that out of the 18 political parties in the country, only the Allied People's Movement (APM) fielded a female presidential candidate (Osigbodi, 2024).

For the Senate, it is observed that out of the 1,101 candidates vying for 109 Senatorial seats, 92 are women, representing 8.35 per cent while 288 women are contesting for House of Representatives out of the total 3,122 candidates. According to the researcher, a state-by-state analysis shows that of the 36 states of Nigeria, including the Federal Capital Territory, five states did not field any woman as a candidate for the Senate while one State did not field any woman as a candidate for the House of Representatives (Osigbodi, 2024).

Ifendu listed the states lacking in this regard as Kano, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe, and Zamfara for the Senate and Jigawa for the House of Representatives. "This means that even without conducting elections, 13.5 per cent of states will not have female representatives at the Senate while 2.7 per cent of states will have no female representation at the House of Representatives," she said (Osigbodi, 2024).

2.5 Challenges Against Women's Active Participation in Politics

Several impediments have been identified as limiting the participation of women in the social, economic, and political scenes. The causes behind the underrepresentation of women in governmental positions are divided into two categories: supply and demand. Supply refers to women's general ambition to run for office and access to resources like education and time, while demand refers to elite support, voter bias, and institutional sexism. This intervention would focus on some distinctly Nigerian variants of these barriers.

Women face numerous obstacles in achieving representation in governance. The biggest challenges a woman in government can face occur during the pursuit of her position in a government office, as opposed to when she is upholding said position. One of the big challenges is financing a campaign. Studies also show that women running for political office raise a similar amount of money in comparison to their male counterparts, however, they feel

they need to work harder to do so. Violence against women in politics also dissuades women from running (Lawless and Fox, 2023).

According to a survey conducted on a sample of 3,640 elected municipal officeholders, women face adversities with things such as financing a campaign because they are not as heavily recruited as men by party leaders. Two factors contribute to this trend. Firstly, party leaders tend to recruit candidates who are similar to them. Since most party leaders are men, they usually see men as prime candidates because they share more similarities than most women do. The same concept applies when discussing the second factor. Recruitment works through networks such as lower-level office holders or affiliated businesses. Since women are underrepresented in these networks, according to statistics, they are less likely to be recruited than men. Due to these challenges, women have to spend time and conscious effort building a financial support system, unlike men (Lawless and Fox, 2011).

Some have argued that politics is a "matrix of domination" designed by race, class, gender, and sexuality. Intersectionality plays a large role in the treatment women face when running for political office and their time serving in a political position. One study in Brazil found racial disparities that fall even heavier on women candidates during candidate recruitment and selection processes. Afro-descendant Brazilian women were the most disadvantaged when running for political office (Lawless and Fox, 2011).

Society

Gender inequality within families, inequitable division of labour within households, and cultural attitudes about gender roles further subjugate women and serve to limit their representation in public life. Also, the political underrepresentation of women in post-Soviet democracy which tend to be characterized by high levels of political corruption is often expected to be a result of patriarchal gender norms and voter's preferences for placing men in leadership positions (Moser and Scheiner, 2012). Highly patriarchal societies often have local power structures that make it difficult for women to combat. Thus, their interests are often not represented or under-represented.

Voter bias

One major challenge female candidates must overcome to obtain political positions is voter bias. Women were more likely to state that it was easier for men to get elected into higher office. The study found that 58% of men and 73% of women claimed it was easier for men to get elected into higher office. In the US, according to one survey, 15% of Americans still believe men make better political candidates than women. Another survey found that 13% of American women either strongly agree or agree that men tend to make better political candidates than women do (Lawless and Fox, 2011).

In the US, many voters assume men and women possess traits that reflect the stereotypes they believe. Many assume women candidates are too emotional, more willing to give in or compromise, under-qualified, and gentler. These notions often affect women negatively, as people often believe that many women should not be running for office because of these candidate stereotypes (Dolan, 2014).

Systematic challenges

There have been many arguments saying the plurality-majority voting system is a disadvantage to the chance of women getting into office. Andrew Reynolds (1997) brings forth one of these arguments by stating: "Plurality-majority single-member-district systems, whether of the Anglo-American first-past-the-post (FPTP) variety, the Australian preference ballot alternative vote (AV), or the French two-round system (TRS), are deemed to be particularly unfavourable to women's chances of being elected to office". Andrew Reynolds believes that the best systems are list-proportional systems. "In these systems of high proportionality between seats won and votes cast, small parties can gain representation and parties have the incentive to broaden their overall electoral appeal by making their candidate lists as diverse as possible".

Even once elected, women tend to hold lesser-valued cabinet ministries or similar positions. These are sometimes described as "soft industries" and include health, education, and welfare. Far less often do women hold executive

decision-making authority in more powerful domains or those that are associated with traditional notions of masculinity (such as the military).

Typically, the more powerful the institution, the less likely it is that women's interests will be represented. Additionally, in more autocratic nations, women are less likely to have their interests represented. Many women attain political standing due to kinship ties, as they have male family members who are involved in politics. These women tend to be from higher-income, higher-status families and thus may not be as focused on the issues faced by lower-income families. In the United States, the lower end of the professional ladder contains a higher proportion of women while the upper level contains a higher proportion of men. The research according to Smith and Monaghan (2013) shows that women are underrepresented in head positions in state agencies making up only 18% of Congress and 15% of corporate board positions. When women do gain any level of representation it is in the fields of health, welfare, and labour. They are seen to be addressing issues labelled as feminine.

Personal Life and Choices

Additionally, women running for public office typically gain additional, unnecessary scrutiny on their private lives. For instance, the fashion choices of politically active women are often picked apart by the media. In these "analyses" women rarely gain approval from those in the media, who usually say they either show too much skin or too little, or perhaps that they either look too feminine or too masculine. Sylvia Bashevkin, (2009) also notes that their romantic lives are often subject of much interest to the general population, perhaps more than their political agenda or stances on issues. She points out that those who "appear to be sexually active outside a monogamous heterosexual marriage run into particular difficulties since they tend to be portrayed as vexatious vixens" who are more interested in their private romantic lives than in their public responsibilities. If they are in a monogamous, married relationship but have children, then their fitness for office becomes a question of how they manage being a politician while taking care of their children, something that a male politician would rarely, if ever, be asked about. Family duties and family forming cause significant delays in aspiring women's

political careers. A 2017 study found that female Republican candidates fare worse in elections than Republican men and Democratic women (Bucchianeri,2018). A 2020 study found that being promoted to the position of mayor or parliamentarian doubles the probability of divorce for women, but not for men (Folke and Rickne,2020).

Political parties

In Canada, there is evidence that female politicians face gender stigma from male members of the political parties to which they belong which can undermine the ability of women to reach or maintain leadership roles. Pauline Marois, leader of the Parti Québécois (PQ) and the official opposition of the National Assembly of Quebec, was the subject of a claim by Claude Pinard, a PQ "backbencher", that many Quebecers do not support a female politician: "I believe that one of her serious handicaps is the fact she's a woman. With sincere believe that a good segment of the population won't support her because she's a woman" (Banerjee,2011). A 2000 study that analysed 1993 election results in Canada found that among "similarly situated women and men candidates", women had a small vote advantage. The study showed that neither voter turnout nor urban/rural constituencies were factors that helped or hurt a female candidate, but "office-holding experience in non-political organizations made a modest contribution to women's electoral advantage" (Black and Erickson,2003).

Bruce M. Hicks (2006), an electoral studies researcher at Université de Montréal, states that evidence shows that female candidates begin with a head start in voters' eyes of as much as 10 per cent, and that female candidates are often more favourably associated with voters with issues like health care and education. The electorate's perception that female candidates have more proficiency in traditional women's spheres such as education and health care presents a possibility that gender stereotypes can work in a female candidate's favour, at least among the electorate. In politics, however, Hicks points out that sexism is nothing new: (Marois' issue) does reflect what has been going on for some time now: women in positions of authority have problems in terms of the way they manage authority. The problem isn't them, it's the men under them

who resent taking direction from strong women. And the backroom dirty dialogue can come into the public eye (Banerjee,2011). Within Quebec itself, Don McPherson pointed out that Pinard himself has enjoyed greater electoral success with Pauline Marois as party leader than under a previous male party leader when Pinard failed to be elected in his riding. Demographically, Pinard's electoral riding is rural, with "relatively older, less-well educated voters" (McPherson, 2011).

In Nigeria, there are not many women in positions of leadership. Only three of the 109 senators and 14 of the 360 members of the House of Representatives are women at the moment. There are several explanations for why women's political party participation is so low. For instance, women are discouraged from running for office due to the expensive outflow of politics. The requisite nomination and declaration of interest forms that political parties require candidates to submit to run for seats on their platform are frequently out of the reach of women. Also, the cost of an election campaign is outrageous. And limited access to education also means limited access to jobs that pay well. Women are also less likely to be able to afford to continue the process of obtaining leadership positions due to unpaid labour responsibilities, unequal inheritance rights, open discrimination and societal barriers to women's representation.

2.6 Societal Barriers to Women's Representation in Politics

The following are some of the societal barriers to women's representation in politics: -

Resource gaps

In one study that looked at campaign funding in Chile, researchers found a significant gender bias against women in campaign funding. In Chile, parties are given money directly from the government to allocate to their various

candidates, and candidates are limited to a certain amount of money they can spend on their campaign. The Chilean government instituted multiple policies to try and increase gender representation. They placed a 40% quota on political seats and reimbursed political parties when they chose female political candidates to incentivize them. Even in this "least-likely" case, researchers found that in candidates with no prior experience running for office, men would out-fundraise women (Hinjosa & Piscopo).

Intersectionality and Challenges Faced by Women

Many of the challenges women face that lead to their underrepresentation in political office are amplified through other institutional factors. Race, specifically, plays an increasingly large role in the challenges faced by women when deciding to run for office, actively running for office, and actively holding office. In one study which focused on the treatment of Afro-Brazilian women, researchers found that institutionalizing parties increases the chance that parties will elect women; however, the effect is more muted for Afro-Brazilians. In Brazil, African-Americans already face a significant resource gap like lower average income, lower levels of legislation, and higher illiteracy rates. In conjunction with these barriers, Afro-Brazilian women also face barriers to access to power. Researchers found that Afro-descendant women consistently raised less money and won fewer voters even when they possessed the traditional characteristics of an adequate political candidate (Htun, 2004).

One study found that intersectionality plays a significant role in the ambition of women and their decision to run for political office. They found that when women were told the different reasons for the underrepresentation of women in political office, women of different races responded very differently. Researchers stated that "Attributing women's lack of parity to demand factors allows white and Asian women to "discount" the possibility that failure rests on their abilities, thus increasing women's political ambition. Alternatively, framing women's underrepresentation as due to supply factors depresses white and Asian women's political ambition possibly because of stereotype threat. Black women respond oppositely, with depressed political ambition in demand

scenarios, while Latinas are unaffected by these narratives" (Collins and Bilge, 2020).

Mirror Representation

Women's participation in formal politics is lower than men throughout the world. The argument put forth by scholars Jacquetta Newman and Linda White (2012) is that women's participation in the realm of high politics is crucial if the goal is to affect the quality of public policy. As such, the concept of mirror representation aims to achieve gender parity in public office. In other words, mirror representation says that the proportion of women in leadership should match the proportion of women in the population that they govern. Mirror representation is premised on the assumption that elected officials of a particular gender would likely support policies that seek to benefit constituents of the same gender.

Effects on Public Policy

A key critique is that mirror representation assumes that all members of a particular sex operate under the rubric of a shared identity, without taking into consideration other factors such as age, education, culture, or socioeconomic status. However, proponents of mirror representation argue that women have a different relationship with government institutions and public policy than that of men, and therefore merit equal representation on this facet alone. This feature is based on the historical reality that women, regardless of background, have largely been excluded from influential legislative and leadership positions. As Sylvia Bashevkin (1993) notes, "representative democracy seems impaired, partial, and unjust when women, as a majority of citizens, fail to see themselves reflected in the leadership of their polity." The issue of participation of women in politics is of such importance that the United Nations has identified gender equality in representation (i.e. mirror representation) as a goal in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action. Besides seeking equality, the goal of mirror representation is also to recognize the significance of women's involvement in politics, which subsequently legitimizes said involvement.

There have been differing results between studies that looked at the significance of women's representation on actual policy outcomes. Though women in the United States are more likely to identify as feminists, a 2014 study looking at the United States finds "no effect of gender of the mayor on policy outcomes (Ferreira and Gyourko, 2014)" A 2012 study finds mixed evidence that the share of female councillors in Sweden affected conditions for women citizens, such as women's income, unemployment, health, and parental leave. A 2015 study in Sweden said: "The findings show that female legislators defend feminist interests more than their male colleagues but that they only marginally respond to women's electoral preferences" (Svaleryd and Vlachos, 2012). A 2016 study looking at African politicians finds "gender differences in policy priorities quite small on average, vary across policy domains and countries" (Clayton, Josefsson and Wang, 2016).

Social and Cultural Barriers

Mirror representation stems from the barriers female political candidates often face. These include sex stereotyping, political socialization, lack of preparation for political activity, and balancing work and family. In the media, women are often asked how they would balance the responsibilities of elected office with those of their families, something men are never asked.

Religious and socio-cultural factors, the social, political, and economic constraints that these groups must contend with are actively supported by religion, which also works to promote gender stereotypes that are discriminatory against women. For instance, in some northern parts of Nigeria, women are in Purdahs out of reverence for Islam. This suggests that they are segregated in their rooms and that only their spouses have full access to them. The spouse is the only one who must satisfy their requirements. It is best to let rumours about how people are living since the majority of homes are below the poverty line. Religion ensures that a significant majority of women are excluded from economic and political activities, including voting and running for office (Luka, 2011). Islamic edicts are frequently cited as justification for practices like the state's practice of keeping women in "Purdah," giving girls away in early marriages, denying them an education, and limiting their ability

to participate effectively in politics in general and when selecting candidates of their choice. The majority of Muslim- populated states in the north observe "purdah," which involves excluding women from the public eye. In purdah, women must always have a male companion with them when they are out in public and are not permitted to leave their homes without their husbands' permission. Further restricting the flexibility of attire for women under purdah is the requirement for Muslim women to cover their faces in public. There is a cultural presumption that women are abominable when they lead men and cannot lead but must be guided. Many women are unable to be found in high-hierarchy positions due to religious and cultural philosophies that work against gender equality and employment prospects for men and women (Abdu, 2002).

Sex Stereotyping

Sex stereotyping assumes that masculine and feminine traits are intertwined with leadership. Hence, the bias levelled against women stems from the perception that femininity inherently produces weak leadership. Due to the aggressive and competitive nature of politics, many insist that participation in elected office requires masculine traits. Sex stereotyping is far from being a historical narrative. The pressure is on female candidates (and not male ones) to enhance their masculine traits to garner support from voters who identify with socially constructed gender roles. Apart from this, studies by American University in 2011 reveal that women are 60% less likely than men to believe that they are not qualified to take political responsibility. So, the patriarchy in politics is responsible for less participation of women (Lawless and Fox, 2011).

Sexual and Physical Violence

In Kenya, a women's rights activist named Asha Ali was threatened and beaten by three men for standing as a candidate in front of her kids and elderly mother. A 2010 survey of eight hundred likely U.S voters found that even very mild sexist language had an impact on their likelihood of voting for a woman (Krook, 2017). Even in early 2016, a 14-year-old girl was kidnapped from her bed late at night and raped as revenge for her mother's victory in local elections in India, which is an example of sexual violence. Political violence is another

element that lowers women's political participation in Nigeria. Due to the involvement of thugs before, during, and after elections (Kolawale et al., 2012) and the ensuing insecurity, which involves the loss of lives and property, politics is generally out of the question for women. A female political candidate, Dorathy Nyone, described her own experience by saying, "A ward chairman was shot dead; all the women and most of the males fled the scene." My partner picked me up and drove me home. I was afraid since, to determine the winners by hand, only men who were well equipped for the bloodshed remained behind (Luka, 2011).

Even though this tale typically represents electoral violence in Nigeria, many women now fear politics due to the recent spate of political murders, ongoing political intimidation, and other violent acts. All of this evidence suggests that women face many challenges in a political environment where men try to suppress women whenever they try to raise their voices in politics to make positive changes for women's empowerment.

Lack of Media Support

The qualitative and quantitative study reveals that media reflects and strengthens a male-overwhelmed society. Women in the news are usually for bad news and just for all the vulgar or wrong reasons such as about their looks, personal life and their clothes and characters. Media likes to give more updates about all these above examples instead of their actual political roles and achievements.

Political Socialization

Political socialization is the idea that, during childhood, people are indoctrinated into socially constructed norms of politics. In the case of women's representation in government, it says that sex stereotyping begins at an early age and affects the public's disposition on which genders are fit for public office. Socialization agents can include family, school, higher education, mass media, and religion. Each of these agents plays a pivotal role in either fostering a desire to enter politics or dissuading one to do so.

Generally, girls tend to see politics as a "male domain". Newman and White suggest that women who run for political office have been "socialized toward an interest in and life in politics" and that "many female politicians report being born into political families with weak gender-role norms". Women running for U.S. Senate are often underrepresented in news coverage. The way male and female candidates are depicted in media affects how female candidates get elected into public office. Female candidates get treated differently in the media than their male counterparts in the U.S. Senate elections. Women receive less news coverage and the coverage they do receive concentrates more on their viability and less on their issue positions, which causes female candidates to be overlooked and underrated during elections, which is an obstacle for women running for U.S. Senate (Campell and Wolbrecht, 2006).

Lack of Preparation for Political Activity

An aftereffect of political socialization is that it determines how inclined women are to pursue careers that may be compatible with formal politics. Careers in law, business, education, and government, professions in which women happen to be minorities, are common occupations for those who later decide to enter public office.

Discriminatory Customs and Laws

The customs of many modern countries are discriminatory because they devalue women and treat them as men's property. Women feel generally inferior to men and are at a disadvantage in the socio-political environment, even in urban regions, as a result of gender stereotyping cultural norms, and behaviours. Because of these socially constructed standards and stereotype roles, women overemphasize their "femininity" because they accept their status as "weaker sexes," overemphasize the sensitive element of their sex and equate high performance with men. For instance, most traditions place more value on sending the boy to a school than they do on the girl, who is expected to care for the siblings and find a husband. This makes it more difficult for women to compete with men in politics because there are a few more illiterate women than there used to be. (Agbalajobi, 2010).

Balancing Work and Family

The work-life balance is invariably more difficult for women because they are generally expected by society to act as the primary caregivers for children and maintainers of the home. Due to these demands, it is assumed that women would choose to delay political aspirations until their children are older. Also, a woman's desire for a career in politics along with the extent that the respondent feels her family duties might inhibit her ability to be an elected official. Research has shown that new female politicians in Canada and the U.S. are older than their male counterparts. Conversely, a woman may be pushed to remain childless to seek political office (Fox and Lawless, 2010).

Institutional barriers may also pose a hindrance to balancing a political career and family. For instance, in Canada, Members of Parliament do not contribute to Employment Insurance; therefore, they are not entitled to paternity benefits. Such lack of parental leave would undoubtedly be a reason for women to delay seeking electoral office. Furthermore, mobility plays a crucial role in the work-family dynamic. Elected officials are usually required to commute long distances to and from their respective capital cities, which can be a deterrent for women seeking political office (Tremblay, 2003).

2.7 Amelioration of Women's Involvement and Participation in Nigerian Politics

There was no gender parity in problems of leadership in the public and private sectors of the economy during the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras. There have always been problems with male domination in Nigerian leadership, and the lack of female involvement in public affairs hurts the expansion of organizations. The Beijing Conference in 1995, also known as the Fourth International Conference on Women, which emphasized equal participation of women in decision-making bodies, marked the beginning of the golden age of women. It also implied that difficulties facing society should be balanced between men and women. The main metrics for measuring effective leadership - participatory leadership, accountability, and transparency - call for gender parity in leadership opportunities (Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2015).

To ensure that women have the chance to engage in leadership, Nigeria has ratified a variety of international, regional, and national legislation; yet, these laws are only put into practice on paper. Despite the 30% and 35% affirmative action offered to women in the National Gender Policy (2006) and the National Women Policy (2000), respectively, Nigeria has not been able to show its commitment by electing women to leadership posts. The high level of poverty among women is a result of their lack of access to resources like microcredit programs, capital for large-scale investment, and land for agricultural pursuits. This can be lessened, though, by providing equitable access to resources, advancing technology, empowering women in their entrepreneurship, enlightening women about investment prospects, and assisting women in the development of small, medium, and large-scale businesses. Campaigns have been undertaken to register women and girls in elementary, post-primary, and tertiary institutions. The percentage of women and girls enrolled in school varies by geopolitical zone, according to the 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (64% in the North East, 69% in the North West, and 5% in the South-South and South East). According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2016), this is supported by the fact that 48.8% of girls enrolled in primary school and 45.7% in secondary school, and that the completion rates for these two levels of education are 48.3% and 47.9%, respectively. Additionally, 43.7% of girls attended tertiary institutions, with a 38.4% completion rate (Udom et al., 2022). Taking leadership positions in private and public organizations becomes challenging when women and girls are not given equal opportunities and access to education. Changing the perception of most Nigerian parents, especially those in rural areas, on the role of women in society will help in achieving this (Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2016).

2.8 Theoretical Framework

This research work employs the theoretical framework of feminism. With its roots tracing back to the intellectual contributions of early liberal feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill in the 18th century, the feminist theory constitutes a comprehensive assemblage of intellectual frameworks and perspectives that endeavour to comprehend and scrutinize the

multifarious social, political, and economic disparities and oppressions encountered by women and individuals who identify with marginalized gender categories (Cudd, 2022). Its genesis can be traced back to the latter part of the 19th century and the early 20th century, arising as a retort to gender-based discrimination and the arduous struggle for women's rights (Ferguson, 2017).

The crux of the feminist theory lies in its acknowledgement of the historical and contemporary social structures that have routinely placed women at a disadvantage, engendering and perpetuating gender inequities (Gross, 2013). Its fundamental objective resides in the critical evaluation and eventual transformation of these structures through the meticulous examination of power dynamics, gender roles, and societal norms. Feminist theorists delve into the intricate intersections between gender and other systems of oppression, such as race, class, sexuality, and ability, elucidating their collective influence on individual experiences and the establishment of social hierarchies (Ferguson, 2017).

Feminist theory operates on a series of fundamental assumptions that serve as the bedrock for its analysis and critique of gender-based inequalities. While specific feminist theories may place varying degrees of emphasis on particular aspects, the following assumptions generally underpin the feminist framework:

Gender as a social construct: Feminist theory acknowledges that gender is not an inherent or biologically determined trait, but rather a social construct that shapes societal expectations, roles, and behaviours associated with female/femininity and male/masculinity. It asserts that these socially constructed gender norms are acquired through socialization processes and are subject to modification.

Patriarchy as a power system: Feminist theory contends that patriarchal structures, which prioritize and grant privileges to men's interests and authority, underlie various forms of gender-based oppression. Patriarchy is understood as a system that permeates social, political, and economic institutions, reinforcing male dominance and perpetuating gender inequalities.

Intersectionality: Feminist theory recognizes the intersectional nature of gender by acknowledging that it intertwines with other systems of oppression, such as race, class, sexuality, and ability. Intersectionality highlights that individuals' experiences of privilege or marginalization are shaped by the combination of multiple social identities and the interplay of diverse forms of oppression. It emphasizes the necessity of considering the interconnectedness of these systems when analyzing gender inequality.

The personal as political: Feminist theory posits those individual experiences of gender-based discrimination and oppression are interconnected with broader social and political structures. It acknowledges that personal experiences are not isolated incidents, but rather reflections of systemic inequalities and power dynamics. Consequently, personal struggles and individual choices are perceived as political acts that can challenge or reinforce existing power structures.

The centrality of women's experiences and voices: Feminist theory places a central focus on women's experiences, perspectives, and voices that have historically been marginalized or silenced. It seeks to highlight and validate women's lived realities, contesting dominant male-centric narratives and knowledge production. This emphasis on women's experiences aims to reveal and challenge how women have been excluded or misrepresented in various spheres of life.

Activism and social change: Feminist theory is not confined to intellectual inquiry alone but is intrinsically linked to activism and the pursuit of social change. It endeavours to identify and challenge oppressive practices while advocating for gender equality. Feminist theory acknowledges the significance of individual and collective action in effecting meaningful social transformation and strives to create inclusive and equitable societies (Gross, 2013).

These assumptions form the basis for a comprehensive understanding of the systemic nature of gender inequality, and they inform the design and implementation of interventions and policies that aim to challenge and dismantle oppressive structures while promoting equitable and inclusive societies. The theory, however, has faced criticism for being perceived as

overly descriptive rather than prescriptive, lacking a comprehensive plan to address the issues raised (Rosenfelt & Newton, 2013). Integrating feminist theory into the practice of social work poses challenges, as it is often discussed about ethical considerations and the prevailing male-dominated culture resulting from systemic oppression and power imbalances.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research procedures and methods the researcher will be employing to obtain data needed for the study. It comprises the research design, population of the study, sample size, sampling technique, research instrument, validity of the instrument, sources of data, and method of data analysis. This chapter entails the methods adopted in preferring solutions to the topic under study.

3.2 Research Design

The researcher used the survey research design. The choice of this research design was considered appropriate because of its advantages of identifying attributes of a large population from a group of individuals. The design was suitable for the study as the study sought to investigate feminism and the decline of women's participation in Nigerian politics.

3.3 Population of the Study

The population of the study is the total number of objects, subjects or individuals that conform to a set of specifications about the research area (Omoera & Nwaoboli, 2023). In this research, the population of this study

consisted of residents in Ovia North East local government area of Edo State. According to the National Population Commission of Nigeria (web), National Bureau of Statistics (web) 2022, Review, the population of Ovia North East is estimated to be 229,500.

3.4 Sample Size and Technique

This study makes use of the multi-stage sampling techniques to select the samples. This is to ensure the precision and thoroughness of the figures. The procedure was appropriate for this study because the respondents was chosen in stages using the stratified, purposive and simple sampling procedure. Given the nature and size of the population, it was impracticable and unrealistic to study the entire population of Ovia North East local government area therefore only a representative was selected. Hence the sample size for this research were one hundred and twenty (120) respondents.

3.5 Research Instrument

The research instrument for the study were a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher. The questionnaires were administered to respondents to complete without disclosing their identities. The questionnaire was designed to obtain sufficient and relevant information from the respondents. The questionnaire consisted of a 4-point Likert scale response of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD).

3.6 Validity of the Instrument

To enhance the content validity of the research instrument, the constructed questionnaire for the study was presented to the project supervisor to confirm content validity. Necessary corrections were made after which it was re-written before it was administered by the researcher.

3.7 Sources of Data

Data was collected from two main sources namely; primary source and Secondary source. Primary source entails materials of statistical investigation which will be collected by the researcher for a particular purpose. They can be

obtained through a survey, observation questionnaire or an experiment. Secondary sources are data from textbooks, Journals, handsets etc. The researcher adopted the questionnaire as a method of data collection for this study.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

The data obtained was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Simple descriptive statistics such as frequency count and simple percentages was used in presenting the findings of the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSES AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter dealt with data analysis and presentation of results. The data were primarily sourced from the administered questionnaires. A total of one hundred and twenty (120) questionnaires were administered to respondents in the Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	62	51.67
	Female	58	48.33
	Total	120	100

Age	16–20	34	28.33
	21–25	25	20.83
	26–30	36	30.00
	30years above	25	20.83
	Total	120	100
Educational Level	No Formal Education	10	8.3
	Primary Education	20	16.7
	Secondary Education	40	33.3
	Tertiary Education	50	41.7
	Total	120	100
Marital Status	Single	44	36.67
	Married	52	43.33
	Separated	11	9.17
	Divorced	13	10.83
	Total	120	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 1 indicates that the study comprises both males and females. The table shows that the study comprised respondents with diverse age distributions. It suggests that a greater proportion of the respondents, representing 30.00% are between the ages of 26 and 30. The table shows that the study was composed of respondents with different education statuses. Also, respondents who had a tertiary education qualification at the time the questionnaires were administered were more involved in the study, as shown in the study, with a representation of 41.7% as seen above. The table shows that the study is composed of single, married, and separated individuals. However, single respondents are more available for the research study, indicating 36.67% of the respondents.

4.3 Analysis of Data from Survey (Field)

Research Question 1: What is the perceived social acceptance of women's participation in Nigerian politics?

Table 2: Distribution of responses on the perceived social acceptance of women's participation in Nigerian politics

S/n	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	Women constitute about 60% of the Nigerian electorate	35 (29.17%)	40 (33.33%)	27 (22.50%)	18 (15.00%)
2	Women are about half of the population in the entire country	32 (26.67%)	51 (42.50%)	20 (16.67%)	17 (14.17%)
3	Less than 20% of political offices are held by women	46 (38.33%)	48 (40.00%)	18 (15.00%)	8 (6.67%)
4	Women made desperate efforts to enter into representative politics, but with little success	28 (23.33%)	53 (44.17%)	26 (21.67%)	13 (10.83%)
5	Women's low political participation is a universal phenomenon	50 (41.67%)	42 (35.00%)	20 (16.67%)	8 (6.67%)

Source: Field Survey 2025

The analysis of data in the above table revealed that under item 1, 65.5% of the sampled respondents either strongly agreed or agreed on the notion that women constitute about 60% of the Nigerian electorate. Under item 2, 69.17% of the sampled respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that women are about half of the population in the entire country. Under item 3, 78.33% of the sampled respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that less than 20% of political offices are held by women. Under item 4, 67.5% of the sampled respondents either strongly agreed or agreed on the notion that women made desperate efforts to enter into representative politics but with little success. Under item 5, 76.67% of the sampled respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the notion that women's low political participation is a universal phenomenon.

The analysis of data in the table above indicate the perceived social acceptance of woman participation in Nigeria politics, the study reveal as agreed by the respondents' women constitutes about 60% of the Nigeria electorate, women are about half of the population in the entire country, less than 20% of political office are held by women, women made desperate efforts to enter into representative politics but with little success, and women's low political participation is a universal phenomenon.

Research Question 2: What is the perceived historical status of women's participation in Nigerian politics?

Table 3: Distribution of responses on the perceived historical status of women's participation in Nigerian politics

S/n	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
6	The low participation of women in politics was also fostered by the nature of post-colonial politics	30 (25.00%)	30 (25.00%)	28 (23.33%)	32 (26.67%)
7	In pre-colonial Nigeria, women occupied important roles in the traditional political life	29 (24.17%)	19 (15.83%)	33 (27.50%)	39 (32.50%)
8	During the colonial administration, women were not allowed to hold any authoritative position	35 (29.17%)	30 (25.00%)	27 (22.50%)	28 (23.33%)
9	1959 general election, women voted for the first time in Nigeria	35 (29.17%)	27 (22.50%)	30 (25.00%)	28 (23.33%)
10	Women played a peripheral role during the military era	25 (20.83%)	30 (25.00%)	35 (29.17%)	30 (25.00%)

Source: Field Survey 2025

The analysis of data in Table 3 unravelled the historical status of women's participation in Nigerian politics. Under item 6, responses here are more divided, reflecting contested historical narratives. Only 50% agreed that post-colonial politics fostered low participation, with 50% disagreeing—possibly due to optimism about democratic gains, though evidence shows

colonial legacies entrenched patriarchy, reducing women's roles from pre-colonial prominence Under item 7, 60% of the sampled respondents either strongly disagreed or disagreed that in pre-colonial Nigeria, women held influential positions in kinship structures, markets, and councils. Under item 8, 54.17% of the sampled respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that colonial administration barred women from authority, as British indirect rule marginalised women, focusing power on male chiefs. Under item 9, 51.67% of the sampled respondents either strongly agreed or agreed on the notion that historically, southern women voted earlier (1950s), while northern enfranchisement lagged until 1979. Under item 10, 54.17% of the sampled respondents either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the notion that women played a peripheral role during the military era.

The analysis of data in the above table reveals the historical status of women's participation in Nigerian politics. As revealed by the study, respondents agreed that colonial administration barred women from authority, as British indirect rule marginalised women, focusing power on male chiefs. And the 1959 general election, women voted for the first time in Nigeria. However, disagree that in pre-colonial Nigeria, women occupied important roles in the traditional political life, and women played a peripheral role during the military era. Also, respondents are more divided, with low participation of women in politics also fostered by the nature of post-colonial politics, with 50% agreeing that post-colonial politics fostered low participation, 50% disagreeing.

Research Question 3: What are the major challenges to women's participation in Nigerian politics?

Table 4: Distribution of responses on the major challenges to women's participation in Nigerian politics

S/n	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
11	Inadequate knowledge of written and unwritten rules protecting women's political rights	41 (34.17%)	45 (37.50%)	23 (19.17%)	11 (9.17%)
12	Family responsibilities and childbearing hinder women	44	45	20	11

	from participating effectively in politics	(36.67%)	(37.50%)	(16.67%)	(9.17%)
13	Women are seen as domestic beings with their place in the kitchen	39 (32.50%)	38 (31.67%)	31 (25.83%)	12 (10.00%)
14	Lack of economic incentives (Financial backing)	46 (38.33%)	43 (35.83%)	21 (17.50%)	10 (8.33%)
15	Gender inequality is a cause of women's participation in politics	37 (30.83%)	41 (34.17%)	33 (27.50%)	9 (7.50%)

Source: Field Survey 2025

The analysis of data in Table 4 unravelled the major challenges to women's participation in Nigerian politics. Under item 11, 71.67% of the sampled respondents either strongly agreed or agreed on the notion that inadequate knowledge of written and unwritten rules protects women's political rights. Under item 12, 74.17% of the sampled respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that family responsibilities hindered women's political participation. Under item 13, 64.17% of the sampled respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that cultural views of women as domestic figures hinder their political participation. Under item 14, 74.16% of the sampled respondents either strongly agreed or agreed on the notion that lack of financial backing hinders women's political participation. Under item 15, 65% of the sampled respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the notion that gender inequality is also a major cause of women's inactive participation in politics.

The analysis of data in the above table implies that there is a plethora of challenges to women's participation in Nigerian politics, which include inadequate knowledge of written and unwritten rules protecting women's political rights, family responsibilities and childbearing, cultural views of women as domestic figures, and gender inequality.

Research Question 4: What measures would enhance women's participation in Nigerian politics?

Table 5: Distribution of responses on the measures that would enhance women's participation in Nigerian politics

S/n	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
16	Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women	41 (34.17%)	52 (43.33%)	22 (18.33%)	5 (4.17%)
17	Women's participation can be enhanced by giving equal opportunity	55 (45.83%)	47 (39.17%)	15 (12.50%)	3 (2.50%)
18	An enabling environment that allows women to engage in the decision-making process sustainably and effectively, free from political harassment and violence	45 (37.50%)	47 (39.17%)	17 (14.17%)	11 (9.17%)
19	Empowering women through enhanced strategic human resource development	50 (41.67%)	47 (39.17%)	16 (13.33%)	7 (5.83%)
20	Building a Coalition of NGOs and Grassroots women's associations that coordinates the support and advocacy for women aspirants	55 (45.83%)	46 (38.33%)	12 (10.00%)	7 (5.83%)

Source: Field Survey 2025

The analysis of data in Table 5 revealed the measures that would enhance women's participation in Nigerian politics. Under item 16, 77.5% of the sampled respondents either strongly agreed or agreed on the notion that eliminating discrimination could enhance women's political participation. Under item 17, 85% of the sampled respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that equal opportunities could enhance women's political participation. Under item 18, 76.67% of the sampled respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that an enabling environment that allows women to engage in the decision-making process sustainably and effectively, free from political harassment and violence, could enhance women's political participation. Under item 19, 80.84% of the sampled respondents either strongly agreed or agreed on the notion that empowering women through enhanced strategic human resource development could enhance women's political participation. Under item 20, 84.16% of the sampled respondents either strongly agreed or agreed on the notion that building a coalition of NGOs and grassroots women's associations that coordinates the support and advocacy for women aspirants could enhance women's political participation.

The analysis of data from the table above implies that several measures could be adopted to enhance women's participation in Nigerian politics. The measures include: eliminating discrimination and ensuring equal opportunities. Enabling harassment-free environments, empowerment via human resource development, and NGO coalitions.

4.4 Discussion of the Finding

In this section, the data were collected from a survey on the topic "Exploring Feminism and the Decline of Women's Participation in Nigerian Politics". Will be discussed. The data was contained in one hundred and twenty (120) fully complete copies of the questionnaire retrieved from the respondents.

Research Question One: What is the perceived social acceptance of women's participation in Nigerian politics?

Findings from research question one reveal that women constitutes about 60% of the Nigeria electorate, women are about half of the population in the entire country, less than 20% of political office are held by women, women made desperate efforts to enter into representative politics but with little success, and women's low political participation is a universal phenomenon. Collaborating with these findings, Adebayo and Amao (2021) note that women make up nearly half of Nigeria's population but are underrepresented in political offices due to systemic barriers. Similarly, Okeke (2022) highlights that women's significant electoral presence does not translate into political representation, a global trend also observed in other patriarchal societies. In dissonance, Afolabi (2023) argues that women's political engagement is often strategic but thwarted by structural constraints like party gatekeeping, suggesting a more nuanced struggle than mere desperation.

Research Question Two: What is the perceived historical status of women's participation in Nigerian politics?

Findings from research question two illuminate the historical status of women's participation in Nigerian politics, revealing mixed perceptions. Respondents were divided on whether post-colonial politics fostered low participation (50% agreement), reflecting disagreement with historical evidence. Nwankwo (2020) assert that colonial legacies, such as British indirect rule, entrenched patriarchal structures, significantly reducing women's political roles compared to pre-colonial systems. The finding that 60% disagreed that women held influential roles in pre-colonial Nigeria contrasts with Eze (2021) highlights women's significant roles in pre-colonial political structures, such as market leadership and council participation. However, the 54.17% agreement that colonial administration barred women from authoritative positions aligns with Agbaje (2022), who notes that colonial policies marginalised women by prioritising male chiefs.

The 51.67% agreement that women voted for the first time in 1959 (with regional variations) **concorde**s with historical records (Ojo, 2023), which confirms southern women's earlier enfranchisement. The disagreement (54.17%) that women played peripheral roles during the military era suggests **disagreement** with Adeyemi (2021), who argues that military regimes further sidelined women, limiting their influence to symbolic roles.

Research Question Three: What are the major challenges to women's participation in Nigerian politics?

Findings from research question three unveil a *barrage of barriers* impeding women's political participation in Nigeria. The findings highlight multiple barriers: inadequate knowledge of political rights (71.67% agreement), family responsibilities (74.17% agreement), cultural perceptions of women as domestic figures (64.17% agreement), lack of financial backing (74.16% agreement), and gender inequality (65% agreement). These align with studies, such as Ibrahim and Yusuf (2022), who identify cultural stereotypes and economic constraints as primary barriers to women's political participation.

Similarly, Ogunleye (2023) emphasises that family responsibilities disproportionately affect women due to societal expectations, limiting their political engagement. While the study suggests inadequate knowledge of political rights as a major issue, Adewale (2024) argues that women are increasingly aware of their rights but lack platforms to exercise them due to institutional biases.

Research Question Four: What measures would enhance women's participation in Nigerian politics?

Findings from research question four offer a beacon *of hope* with measures to bolster women's political participation. The study identifies measures to boost women's participation, including eliminating discrimination (77.5% agreement), providing equal opportunities (85% agreement), creating harassment-free environments (76.67% agreement), empowering women through human resource development (80.84% agreement), and building NGO coalitions (84.16% agreement). These findings align with Okonkwo (2021) advocates for policy reforms to eliminate gender discrimination and create enabling environments. Similarly, Adesina (2023) emphasises the role of NGOs in advocating for women's political inclusion, citing successful grassroots campaigns. Bello (2022) argues that economic empowerment, such as access to funding, is more critical than skill development alone, as financial barriers often outweigh capacity issues.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

This study, titled "Exploring Feminism and the Decline of Women's Participation in Nigerian Politics," investigates the multifaceted issues surrounding women's underrepresentation in Nigeria's political landscape. Drawing from a feminist theoretical framework, the research examines the

historical, social, and structural barriers that have contributed to this decline, while proposing measures to enhance women's involvement. The study is structured across five chapters, each building on the previous to provide a comprehensive analysis. The background highlights that women constitute over 50% of Nigeria's population and electorate, yet hold less than 15% of political positions globally and even lower in Nigeria (e.g., only 5.2% in the National Assembly as of 2023). It traces the roots of marginalisation from pre-colonial equality—where women like Queen Hangbe led warriors and participated in governance through age-grade systems—to colonial subjugation and post-independence patriarchal entrenchment. The problem statement emphasises the lack of gender-disaggregated electoral data pre-2023, patriarchal norms, and external impediments like cultural beliefs. Four research questions guide the study: perceived social acceptance, historical status, major challenges, and enhancement measures. The objectives mirror these, with the broad aim of exploring feminism's role in addressing the decline. The scope is limited to Ovia North East Local Government Area (LGA) in Edo State, and significance includes informing policy, empowering women, and contributing to academic knowledge. Key terms like feminism, patriarchy, and gender equality are defined. Literature reviews and theoretical frameworks conceptualise politics as resource allocation and power dynamics (e.g., Lasswell, 1936; Easton, 1965) and political participation as engagement in governance (Aanghera, 2005). The 1999 Constitution guarantees non-discrimination (Sections 40, 42), yet women's representation remains low (e.g., 11.2% in the Ninth National Assembly). Statistics from the 2023 elections show only 381 women among 4,259 contestants, with some states fielding no female candidates. Challenges are categorised into supply (ambition, resources) and demand (elite support, voter bias) factors, including financing, violence, societal norms, voter stereotypes, systemic barriers (e.g., plurality voting), personal life scrutiny, and party dynamics. Societal barriers like resource gaps and intersectionality (e.g., race amplifying gender issues) are discussed, alongside mirror representation's goal of gender parity for better policy outcomes. Amelioration strategies include affirmative action, education campaigns, and resource access. The feminist theory framework critiques patriarchy as a social construct

perpetuating inequalities, emphasising intersectionality, the personal as political, and activism for change. The methodology. A survey research design was adopted for its suitability in gauging large populations' attributes. The population comprises 229,500 residents of Ovia North East LGA (2022 estimates). A multi-stage sampling technique (stratified, purposive, simple random) selected 120 respondents. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire with a 4-point Likert scale (SA, A, D, SD), validated by the supervisor. Primary data came from questionnaires; secondary data from literature. Analysis used SPSS for frequencies and percentages. Demographics show a near-even gender split (51.67% male, 48.33% female), diverse ages (mostly 26-30), and educational levels (41.7% tertiary). Findings for RQ1 indicate low social acceptance: women as 60% of the electorate but holding <20% offices, with low participation as a universal issue (65-78% agreement). RQ2 reveals contested historical perceptions: colonial barring of women (54.17% agreement), but disagreement on pre-colonial roles (60%) and military-era peripherality (54.17%). RQ3 identifies challenges: inadequate rights knowledge (71.67%), family duties (74.17%), domestic stereotypes (64.17%), financial lacks (74.16%), and gender inequality (65%). RQ4 proposes measures: eliminating discrimination (77.5%), equal opportunities (85%), safe environments (76.67%), empowerment (80.84%), and NGO coalitions (84.16%). Discussions link findings to literature (e.g., Adebayo & Amao, 2021; Nwankwo, 2020), noting alignments on barriers and dissonances on awareness levels.

Overall, the study reveals a persistent decline in women's participation rooted in patriarchal structures, despite constitutional guarantees and international commitments like the Maputo Protocol. Feminism provides a lens to critique and transform these inequities, with empirical evidence from Edo State underscoring the need for systemic change.

5.2 Conclusion

The exploration of feminism and the decline of women's participation in Nigerian politics underscores a profound and enduring gender disparity that undermines democratic principles and societal progress. Women, comprising

nearly half of Nigeria's population and a significant portion of its electorate, remain grossly underrepresented in political leadership, with representation dipping to as low as 5.2% in the National Assembly post-2023 elections. This decline is not merely a statistical anomaly but a manifestation of deeply entrenched patriarchal systems, exacerbated by historical shifts from pre-colonial gender balance to colonial and post-colonial marginalisation.

Feminism, as the theoretical anchor of this study, illuminates how gender is a social construct perpetuated by power imbalances, intersectional oppressions, and norms that relegate women to domestic spheres. The findings affirm that social acceptance of women's political roles is low, with universal underrepresentation despite desperate efforts. Historically, colonial policies and post-independence instabilities eroded women's pre-colonial influence, while challenges like inadequate knowledge of rights, family burdens, cultural stereotypes, financial constraints, and gender inequality perpetuate exclusion. Measures such as discrimination elimination, equal opportunities, harassment-free environments, empowerment, and advocacy coalitions offer pathways forward, aligning with global goals like the SDGs and CEDAW.

In conclusion, the decline in women's participation is a systemic failure that deprives Nigeria of diverse perspectives essential for inclusive governance. Feminism not only critiques this but advocates for transformative action, emphasising that true democracy requires mirroring society's gender composition in leadership. Without addressing these barriers, Nigeria risks perpetuating instability and inequality, as women's exclusion alienates over half its citizenry. This study contributes to the discourse by providing localised evidence from Edo State, reinforcing that gender equality in politics is indispensable for national development and human rights fulfilment.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following detailed and actionable recommendations are proposed to policymakers, civil society, political parties, and stakeholders to reverse the decline in women's political participation in Nigeria.

Policy and Legal Reforms:

The Nigerian government should enforce and expand affirmative action policies, such as mandating a minimum 35% quota for women in elective and appointive positions across all levels (national, state, local), as outlined in the National Gender Policy (2006). This could be legislated through amendments to the 1999 Constitution and Electoral Act, with penalties for non-compliant political parties. Additionally, gender-disaggregated data collection by INEC should be institutionalised beyond 2023, including voter turnout and candidate performance metrics, to track progress and inform interventions.

Educational and Awareness Campaigns:

Launch nationwide campaigns by the Ministry of Women Affairs and NGOs to educate women on their political rights, using media, community workshops, and school curricula. These should challenge patriarchal norms by highlighting pre-colonial women's roles (e.g., Aba Women's Riot) and modern successes in African nations like Rwanda (64% women in parliament). Partnerships with religious and traditional leaders could address cultural barriers, promoting gender equality as compatible with local values.

Economic Empowerment and Resource Support:

Establish dedicated funds, such as a "Women's Political Participation Fund" under the Central Bank of Nigeria or international donors, to provide low-interest loans and grants for female candidates' campaigns. This would mitigate financial barriers, with eligibility tied to training programs on leadership and fundraising. Microcredit schemes should prioritise women in rural areas like Ovia North East LGA, linking economic independence to political ambition.

Creating Safe and Enabling Environments:

Political parties and security agencies must implement zero-tolerance policies against gender-based violence and harassment in politics, including mandatory codes of conduct and reporting mechanisms. Training for party officials on gender sensitivity could reduce voter bias and internal sexism. Flexible parliamentary schedules (e.g., virtual sessions, parental leave) would help

balance family responsibilities, drawing from successful models in countries like Sweden.

Capacity Building and Human Resource Development:

Invest in strategic programs by universities and organisations like the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies to build women's skills in public speaking, policy analysis, and networking. Mentorship schemes pairing aspiring women with established female leaders (e.g., former senators) could foster ambition, with a focus on intersectional groups like rural, disabled, or ethnic minority women.

Coalition Building and Advocacy:

Strengthen coalitions among NGOs (e.g., Women in Politics Forum), grassroots associations, and international bodies like UN Women to advocate for women aspirants. This could include pre-election support like legal aid for nomination disputes and post-election monitoring. Annual summits should evaluate progress toward mirror representation, pressuring parties to diversify candidate lists.

Research and Monitoring:

Future studies should expand beyond Edo State to comparative analyses across geopolitical zones, incorporating qualitative methods like interviews with female politicians. Academic institutions should integrate feminist perspectives into political science curricula to inspire more research on gender dynamics.

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DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY

Dear Respondents,

I am a final year student of the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City carrying out research on the **Exploring Feminism and the Decline of Women's Participation in Nigerian Politics**.

Honestly, the research is purely for academic purposes, any information received by you would be treated with utmost confidentiality.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Please tick the option you consider appropriate and fill in the blank spaces

1. Sex: Male () Female ()
2. Age: 16-20 () 21-25 () 26-30 () 30 years and above ()
4. Marital Status: Single () Married () Separated () Divorced ()

**QUESTIONNAIRE ON EXPLORING FEMINISM AND THE DECLINE OF
WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIAN POLITICS**

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Key: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD)

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
RQ1	What is the perceived social acceptance of women's participation in Nigerian politics?				
1.	Women constitute about 60% of the Nigeria electorate.				
2.	Women are about half of the population in the entire country.				
3.	Less than 20% of political offices are held by women.				
4.	Women made desperate efforts to enter into representative politics but with little success.				
5.	Women's low political participation is a universal phenomenon.				
RQ2	What is the perceived historical status of women's participation in Nigerian politics?				
6.	The low participation of women in politics was also fostered by the nature of post-colonial politics.				
7.	In the pre-colonial Nigeria, women occupied important roles in the traditional political life.				
8.	During the colonial administration, women were not allowed to hold any authoritative position.				
9.	1959 general election women voted for the first time in Nigeria				
10.	Women played a peripheral role during the military era.				
RQ3	What are the major challenges to women's participation in Nigerian politics?				
11.	Inadequate knowledge of written and unwritten rules protecting women's political rights				
12.	Family responsibilities and childbearing hinder women from participating effectively in politics.				
13.	Women are seen as domestic beings with their place in the kitchen.				

14.	Lack of economic incentives (Financial backing)				
15.	Gender inequality is the cause of women's participation in politics.				
RQ4	What measures would enhance women's participation in Nigerian politics?				
16.	Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women				
17.	Women's participation can be enhanced by giving equal opportunity.				
18.	Enabling an environment that allows women to engage in the decision-making process sustainably and effectively free from political harassment and violence.				
19.	Empowering women through enhanced strategic human resource development				
20.	Building a Coalition of NGOs and Grassroots women associations that coordinates the support and advocacy for women aspirants				