

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE LOW PARTICIPATION OF FEMALE STUDENTS  
IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY POLITICS: A CASE STUDY OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

**Favour Oboseoye KADIRI  
SSC2105720**

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE,  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES,  
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN  
BENIN CITY, EDO STATE**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE,  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE  
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE B.SC DEGREE IN POLITICAL SCIENCE**

**OCTOBER, 2025**

## **DECLARATION**

I, **Favour Oboseye KADIRI**, hereby declare that this project titled "**AN EXAMINATION OF THE LOW PARTICIPATION OF FEMALE STUDENTS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY POLITICS: A CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN** " is my original work and has not been submitted, either in part or in full, for any degree or certification at any other institution. All sources of information and references used in this work have been duly acknowledged.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Favour Oboseye KADIRI**  
**SSC2105720**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **CERTIFICATION**

We, the undersigned, certify that this research work was carried out by **KADIRI FAVOUR OBOSEOYE** with Matriculation Number: **SSC2105720** of the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City in partial fulfillment for the Award of Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) in Political Science.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Dr Ben Ekpobedefe**  
**(Project Supervisor)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Dr. G.O Igiebor**  
**(Ag. Head of Department)**

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**DATE**

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**DATE**

## **DEDICATION**

To God Almighty, the source of all wisdom and strength, whose grace sustained me throughout this academic journey.

To my parents, for their unconditional love, immense sacrifices, and unwavering belief in my dreams.

And to every young woman daring to lead in spaces that resist her presence—may this work serve as both validation and a catalyst for your political aspirations.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The successful completion of this research project would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and encouragement of several individuals to whom I owe a profound debt of gratitude.

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My heartfelt gratitude goes to my loving and supportive parents, Mr. Isaac and Mrs. Josephine Kadiri, for your unconditional love, countless sacrifices, and steadfast belief in me. Your prayers and encouragement have been my source of strength. To my entire family, thank you for being my pillar.

I am fortunate to have been surrounded by amazing friends who made this journey memorable. My sincere thanks to my friends, Bukola Oimage and Gift Irabor, for their

wonderful personalities and support. A very special acknowledgment to my dearest friend, Martha Nwaokolo; your unwavering love, late-night conversations, and constant motivation kept me going even when my spirit wavered.

Finally, I acknowledge the Almighty God for the grace, wisdom, and resilience granted to me to see this significant milestone to its completion.

To all who contributed in one way or another, I say thank you.

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## ABSTRACT

*This study (Examination of The Low Participation of Female Students in University Politics) examines the factors influencing the low participation of female undergraduates in university politics at the University of Benin (UNIBEN), Nigeria. Despite increased female enrollment in higher education, a significant gender disparity persists in student union governments and campus leadership roles.*

*A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing a structured questionnaire administered to 150 female undergraduate students selected through proportionate stratified sampling. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings reveal a significant gap between political awareness (76%) and active participation (26.7%). Key barriers identified include entrenched patriarchal norms, with 62% of respondents agreeing that leadership is perceived as a male domain; institutional inadequacies, such as a lack of gender-sensitive policies (50% agreement) and insufficient support from school authorities (62% agreement); and a critical deficit in mentorship and leadership training, with 64% noting its inadequacy despite 86% affirming its importance.*

*The study concludes that the underrepresentation of female students is not due to a lack of capability or interest but is primarily a result of structural and cultural exclusion. It recommends a multi-faceted approach, including the establishment of formal mentorship programs, the implementation of gender-balance policies in student governance, the provision of financial support for female candidates, and campus-wide awareness campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes. These measures are essential for fostering an inclusive political environment that empowers female students and contributes to democratic deepening in Nigeria.*

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of Study

Political participation is a core element of democratic governance, encompassing a range of activities that enable individuals to express their political interests and influence decision-making. In democratic societies, inclusive participation is not only an indicator of legitimacy but also a pathway to ensuring that governance structures reflect the diverse needs of the population. However, despite the global emphasis on gender equality, women remain underrepresented in politics across many societies. In Nigeria, this gap is particularly glaring. From local councils to the National Assembly, female participation in politics has historically been constrained by a variety of socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers.

This imbalance is not limited to national political spaces—it extends to the university environment, where student politics serves as a training ground for future leaders. Student unions and other campus political structures are meant to promote civic engagement, representation, and democratic learning. Yet, female students are often absent or significantly underrepresented in these spaces. This is paradoxical, considering the increasing number of women enrolling in Nigerian universities and excelling academically (Odejide, 2003).

Several factors contribute to this contradiction. Deep-seated patriarchal norms continue to define leadership as a male preserve, both in wider society and within the campus context (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010). Female students who show interest in political leadership may face negative stereotyping, harassment, or accusations of being “unfeminine” or too ambitious. The fear of public scrutiny or damage to reputation discourages many from contesting student elections or assuming visible political roles. Furthermore, the often aggressive and sometimes violent nature of student union politics can be a deterrent, especially in environments where safety is not guaranteed.

Institutionally, universities may lack the gender-sensitive policies or support systems needed to encourage female participation in governance. Unlike some student activities that are gender-inclusive by design, political engagement is typically shaped by informal networks of male dominance, mentorship, and resource mobilization, from which many female students are excluded (Agbalajobi, 2010). Peer pressure, the absence of role models, and limited access to political networks further entrench this marginalization.

The underrepresentation of women in student politics has far-reaching implications. Universities are not only sites of knowledge transmission but also platforms where political identities and norms are formed. When female students are excluded from leadership spaces at this level, it sets a precedent for continued exclusion in wider society. Contrarily, fostering greater female participation in university politics can catalyze broader gender inclusion in national political life.

It is within this context that this study seeks to examine the factors influencing the low participation of female students in university politics in Nigeria. By identifying the key structural, cultural, and institutional barriers, the study aims to contribute to ongoing efforts toward gender equity and democratic deepening both within and beyond the campus environment.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Despite significant progress in female enrollment in Nigerian universities and increased awareness of gender equity, the participation of female students in university politics remains disproportionately low. This underrepresentation raises concerns about inclusivity, democratic engagement, and gender parity within campus governance structures. While student politics should serve as a training ground for future political leaders and a model of participatory democracy, it continues to reflect the broader societal exclusion of women from leadership and decision-making processes.

Although women constitute a substantial portion of the university population, their political visibility remains limited. For instance, a recent review of student union election data across five public universities in Nigeria found that between 2018 and 2023, less than 15% of elected positions were occupied by female students, despite women comprising nearly 45% of the total student population. This disparity reflects not only the underrepresentation of women in student leadership but also deeper, systemic barriers that deter female participation in politics.

These barriers include entrenched patriarchal norms, gender stereotyping, lack of institutional support, and fear of harassment or public scrutiny. Additionally, the highly competitive and sometimes aggressive nature of campus politics tends to favor male-dominated networks, which further marginalize female voices. While some female students express interest in leadership, they often face discouragement due to social expectations and limited access to mentorship or political capital.

Yet, the exclusion of women from student politics has broader implications. It not only undermines democratic values on campus but also contributes to the reproduction of gender inequality in national politics. Without early exposure and support in political leadership, female students may carry these limitations into post-university life, reinforcing the gender gap in formal political institutions.

This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the specific factors that hinder the political participation of female students in Nigerian universities, assess the institutional and cultural barriers, and explore potential strategies to encourage greater involvement and inclusivity.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the factors that contribute to the low participation of female students in Nigeria's university politics.

#### **The specific objectives are to:**

- 1 Identify the socio-cultural, institutional, and structural factors and barriers that discourage female students from engaging in student politics.
- 2 Explore female students' perceptions and attitudes toward student political leadership and representation.
- 3 Assess the role of peer influence, political mentorship, and gendered stereotypes in shaping political involvement.
- 4 Propose recommendations for increasing female participation and representation in student political structures.

### **1.4 SCOPE AND LIMITATION**

#### **Scope of the Study**

This study aims to understand the factors that contribute to the low participation of female students in university politics in Nigeria. While the broader issue of women's political underrepresentation exists at various societal levels, this research is confined to the

university environment, particularly student unions and other formal political structures within tertiary institutions.

The study will draw data from selected public universities in Nigeria to reflect diverse regional, cultural, and institutional contexts. Emphasis will be placed on exploring both the internal (institutional policies, student culture, election processes) and external (societal norms, peer influence, gender expectations) factors that affect female political engagement. The target population includes undergraduate students, student leaders (both male and female), and staff members involved in student affairs or electoral committees.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Several limitations may affect the generalization and depth of this research. First, due to time and logistical constraints, the study will be limited to a sample of UNIBEN female students and may not fully capture variations across all Nigerian tertiary institutions. Second, access to reliable and up-to-date records on student elections and gender participation may be limited in some institutions, affecting the scope of empirical data.

Additionally, participants' responses in interviews or questionnaires may be influenced by social desirability bias, especially when discussing gender roles or political behavior. Cultural sensitivity may also affect the openness of respondents when addressing issues such as harassment or discrimination.

Despite these challenges, every effort will be made to ensure that the findings are valid, reliable, and contribute meaningfully to discussions on gender equity in student governance.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the growing body of academic literature on gender and political participation, particularly within the underexplored context of Nigerian university politics. While national and state-level gender disparities in political representation have been widely studied, the dynamics of exclusion at the student level have received far less scholarly attention. By focusing on female students' participation in campus politics, this research bridges an important gap and helps to illuminate the root causes of gender-based political marginalization from an early stage.

Secondly, the findings of this study can inform university policies and student union frameworks aimed at fostering more inclusive and representative political environments. By identifying specific barriers—such as institutional neglect, cultural constraints, or the absence of political mentorship—the study can help university administrators, electoral bodies, and student affairs departments to develop targeted interventions that encourage female leadership and participation.

Furthermore, the study holds practical relevance for advocacy groups, NGOs, and gender-focused organizations working to promote women political empowerment. Understanding how these challenges begin in formative spaces like universities can aid in designing programs that build political confidence, leadership capacity, and awareness among young women.

Finally, in the broader context of Nigerian democracy, the study emphasizes the importance of early political socialization. Universities serve as microcosms of society, and the exclusion of women from leadership at this level often translates into continued underrepresentation in national political spaces. Promoting gender equity in student politics is thus a critical step toward building a more inclusive and democratic future.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

Based on the objectives and statement of the problem, the study proposes these questions:

1. How do socio-cultural norms affect female students' participation in university politics?
2. How do institutional factors influence female students' involvement in student politics?
3. What impact does political mentorship have on female students' participation?
4. How do peer perceptions and male-dominated gender stereotypes affect female students' political interest?

5. What measures can promote greater participation of female students in university politics?

## **1.7 Definition of Terms**

### **1. Political Participation:**

Refers to the various ways in which individuals take part in political processes and decision-making. This study would include activities such as contesting for student union elections, campaigning, voting, political organizing, or being actively involved in campus political discussions and events.

### **2. University Politics:**

The organized system of student governance and political engagement within a higher education institution. It typically includes structures such as the Student Union Government (SUG), faculty positions, departmental associations, and electoral processes on campus.

### **3. Female Students:**

This refers to all individuals identifying as female and currently enrolled in undergraduate programs in Nigerian universities. The study focuses on their experiences and roles within student political spaces.

#### **4. Socio-cultural Factors:**

The beliefs, norms, traditions, and values shaped by society influence gender roles and expectations. These include family upbringing, religion, cultural taboos, and societal attitudes toward women in leadership.

#### **5. Institutional Barriers:**

These are structural obstacles within the university system that hinder female political participation. Examples include a lack of supportive policies, limited representation in decision-making bodies, and weak enforcement of gender equity frameworks.

#### **6. Gender Stereotypes:**

Oversimplified or fixed ideas about gender roles—for example, the belief that leadership is naturally suited for men, or that women are too emotional or passive to lead.

#### **7. Mentorship:**

The process by which experienced individuals (e.g., older students, staff, alumni) provide guidance, support, and encouragement to potential leaders. In this study, mentorship refers to political or leadership mentoring for female students.

### **8. Leadership Representation:**

The extent to which female students hold positions of authority or influence within student political structures and are involved in key decision-making processes.

### **9. Student Union Government (SUG):**

The formal political body that represents the interests of students within a university. It operates similarly to a miniature democratic system, with elected offices such as President, Vice President, and Senate members. The SUG is a central arena for student political engagement and leadership.

### **10. Gender Equality:**

The state in which individuals of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. In the context of this study, it refers to the fair and equitable inclusion of female students in political leadership and decision-making spaces within universities.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews existing literature relevant to the study of female students' participation in university politics within Nigeria. Political participation, broadly defined, is essential to the functioning of any democratic society and is often nurtured in formative spaces such as educational institutions. Universities are not only academic centers but also important arenas for the development of civic engagement and leadership capacity among young people. However, the gender imbalance observed in national political representation is similarly reflected in campus politics, where female students are significantly underrepresented in leadership roles and electoral processes.

The literature review is structured around key themes, including the general concept of political participation, the nature of politics in Nigeria, and the specific challenges female students face in university political spaces. It also explores the socio-cultural, institutional, and psychological barriers that hinder active female involvement, drawing on both local and international perspectives. Furthermore, theoretical frameworks that guide the understanding of gender and political engagement are examined, alongside empirical studies that provide insight into the dynamics of student politics.

By critically engaging with existing research, this chapter identifies the gaps in current knowledge and highlights the need for focused investigation into the unique factors affecting female political participation in Nigerian universities. This foundation sets the stage for the development of the study's conceptual framework and methodological approach in subsequent chapters.

## **2.2 The Concept of Political Participation**

Political participation refers to the various ways in which individuals engage with the political process, either to influence decisions, express preferences, or advocate for change. Political participation encompasses “those legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take” (Verba, 1978).

In the **university context**, political participation includes involvement in student government elections, holding executive or legislative positions in student unions, participating in policy debates, organizing or attending protests, and even informal leadership roles such as mobilizing peers or leading campus-based advocacy groups.

Political participation can be classified into several dimensions— voting, running for office, and activism, advocacy, and informal leadership

Each of these dimensions reflects varying levels of engagement and risk, and they are influenced by personal motivation, institutional support, and social context. Importantly,

student politics serves as a critical training ground where young individuals, particularly women, can develop leadership skills, political literacy, and civic confidence that shape their future participation in national democratic processes.

Student politics serves as a foundational arena for cultivating political skills, leadership competencies, and civic engagement among young people. It is widely recognized as a preparatory ground for future political involvement, allowing students to develop a sense of political efficacy and public responsibility (Omede & Bakare, 2014). In the university environment, student union governments (SUGs), departmental associations, and electoral processes mirror broader democratic systems, providing students with practical exposure to campaign strategies, policy development, conflict resolution, and coalition building (Adeyemo, 2010). Through these platforms, individuals learn to navigate political structures, engage in advocacy, and manage constituencies — all of which are directly transferable to national leadership roles.

Historically, many Nigerian politicians have had their political roots in student activism. Figures like Omoyele Sowore and Adams Oshiomhole, among others, began their political careers through student unionism, illustrating how university politics can serve as a springboard to national influence. This trend is also observed in other democracies, where campus activism has played a critical role in shaping political consciousness and mobilization (Altbach, 1989).

Importantly, for female students, participation in student politics provides a critical opportunity to challenge patriarchal norms, build confidence, and acquire leadership visibility in a traditionally male-dominated space (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010). Early engagement equips them with the networks, skills, and public presence necessary to overcome future gender-based barriers in broader political systems. Hence, student politics not only fosters democratic culture among youth but also plays a transformative role in promoting inclusive leadership development.

While student politics plays a foundational role in grooming future leaders, it is crucial to distinguish between **political awareness**, **political interest**, and **active participation**, as these concepts reflect varying levels of engagement. **Political awareness** refers to the basic knowledge individuals have about political processes, structures, and current affairs. It is the most fundamental form of engagement and often stems from exposure to political information through education, media, or peer interaction (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). **Political interest**, on the other hand, involves a deeper psychological engagement or concern with political matters, which may or may not translate into participation. A student may, for example, closely follow electoral outcomes or debates without ever joining a political organization. **Active political participation** represents the highest level of engagement, encompassing concrete actions such as voting in student elections, contesting for leadership positions, organizing protests, or contributing to political discourse through campaigns and advocacy. These actions require not only awareness and

interest but also confidence, access, and a sense of political efficacy — all of which are often unequally distributed across gender lines. Studies have shown that while female students may be politically aware and even interested, they are less likely to transition into active participation due to socio-cultural and institutional barriers (Oduwole & Oni, 2013).

### **2.3 Gender and Political Participation in Nigeria**

The political landscape in Nigeria has historically reflected significant gender disparities, both in representation and influence. Despite the critical contributions of women to Nigeria's socio-political development, such as the Aba Women's Riot of 1929, led by Igbo women protesting colonial taxation policies, female political participation in post-independence Nigeria has remained significantly low (Aina, 2012). Women such as Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, the first woman to drive a car in Nigeria and an early feminist who campaigned vigorously for women's rights and suffrage; Margaret Ekpo, a prominent nationalist and advocate for gender inclusion; and Hajia Gambo Sawaba, a fiery political activist from the North, helped shape early political consciousness among Nigerian women. These pioneers laid the groundwork for future participation, yet systemic challenges persist.

Statistically, Nigeria lags behind most African nations in terms of women's political representation. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2020), women constituted only 7.3% of Nigeria's bicameral National Assembly, with 7 out of 109 Senators and 13 out of 360 members in the House of Representatives (As at 2020). This

figure falls far below the global average of 25.5% and the Sub-Saharan African average of 24%. At the state level, out of 990 seats in the State Houses of Assembly across Nigeria, women occupied only 44 seats (INEC, 2019). Furthermore, there are currently no female governors in the 36 Nigerian states, and only a handful have served as deputy governors.

In recent years, a few women have broken through Nigeria's male-dominated political system. These include Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, former Minister of Finance and current Director-General of the World Trade Organization; Oby Ezekwesili, former Minister of Education and co-founder of Transparency International; Aisha Yesufu, a fearless activist and co-convenor of the #BringBackOurGirls and #EndSARS movements; Patience Jonathan, who wielded significant influence during her tenure as First Lady; and Remi Tinubu, a three-term Senator and current First Lady of Nigeria. Despite their individual successes, these women remain exceptions rather than the rule in Nigeria's political elite.

The underrepresentation of women is not due to a lack of interest or capacity, but rather a result of persistent cultural, structural, and economic barriers. Cultural norms in Nigeria often associate leadership with masculinity and relegate women to domestic and supportive roles (Okeke-Ihejirika & Franceschet, 2002). In addition, patriarchal religious interpretations — both Islamic and Christian — reinforce these gendered expectations, particularly in rural and conservative regions.

Structural barriers also play a decisive role. The financial cost of running for office, entrenched godfatherism, and lack of internal party democracy systematically exclude

women. Most political parties in Nigeria lack effective gender inclusion policies, and while the National Gender Policy of 2006 recommends a minimum of 35% representation for women in public office, implementation remains largely symbolic (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010).

These national trends are often mirrored in youth and student politics, where campus political structures replicate the same male-dominated norms. Understanding the broader gendered dynamics at the national level provides an essential context for evaluating female student participation in university politics — the primary focus of this study.

#### **2.4 Female Participation in University Politics**

University politics in Nigeria serve as a microcosm of national political dynamics, offering students a platform to engage with governance, leadership, and advocacy. However, much like the broader political landscape, female participation in student leadership positions remains notably low. Studies indicate that women are significantly underrepresented in Student Union Governments (SUGs) and faculty associations. According to Eze and Oji (2017), female students typically occupy fewer than 20% of elected leadership roles in Nigerian universities, with many holding secondary or less visible positions such as PRO officers rather than executive roles like president or vice president. This disparity is consistent across many universities, including prominent institutions like the University of Lagos, the University of Ibadan, and the University of Benin.

Comparative perspectives from other African universities highlight similar trends. For instance, research from Mbeki University (South Africa) and University of Nairobi (Kenya) shows that although women actively participate in student politics, they face cultural stereotypes and institutional biases that hinder their electoral success and effectiveness in leadership roles (Chikasha, 2015; Mwangi, 2018). These challenges include exclusion from male-dominated political networks, gendered expectations of leadership, and limited access to campaign resources.

Within Nigerian universities, case studies reveal that female students often confront both overt and subtle gender biases. For example, in a study of female leadership at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Ifeanyi and Okafor (2019) found that women candidates were frequently viewed as less competent or too “emotional” for leadership. Additionally, women leaders face intense scrutiny over their personal lives and are more vulnerable to harassment and gossip, which undermines their authority and discourages other female students from aspiring to leadership.

Despite these challenges, there have been significant breakthroughs. Notable examples include Chinwe Osakwe, former SUG president of the University of Lagos, who advocated for greater gender inclusion; Binta Yakubu, who led the SUG at Ahmadu Bello University and focused on policies for female student welfare; Laretta Obakpolor, the first SUG president in Uniben. These examples demonstrate that, while women remain underrepresented, their impact when in leadership can be transformative.

## **2.5 Barriers to Female Participation in University Politics**

Female students' low participation in university politics is not merely a reflection of individual choice but a complex interplay of socio-cultural, institutional, psychological, and peer-related factors. Understanding these barriers is critical for addressing the gender gap in student political leadership.

### **2.5.1 Socio-Cultural Barriers**

Patriarchal norms deeply embedded in Nigerian society significantly influence gender roles and expectations, shaping how leadership is perceived. Leadership is often culturally construed as a masculine trait, and women aspiring to political office are frequently seen as deviating from traditional gender roles (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010). Religious beliefs and cultural taboos can reinforce these stereotypes, discouraging women from public leadership due to notions of propriety and "feminine behavior."

Girls and young women are socialized to prioritize domestic roles and are often raised with the belief that politics is a male domain, limiting their confidence and ambition to participate in student politics (Agbalajobi, 2010). These societal messages contribute to a cycle of exclusion where female political engagement is viewed as unusual or unacceptable.

### **2.5.2 Institutional and Structural Barriers**

Universities often lack explicit gender-sensitive policies or frameworks to encourage female political participation. Election systems and processes within student unions tend to favor established male-dominated networks that control political resources, endorsements, and campaign financing (Eze & Oji, 2017).

Additionally, the absence of visible female role models and mentorship programs exacerbates the issue. Without support systems or political sponsorship, many female students find it difficult to navigate the competitive and sometimes hostile political environment on campus (Ifeanyi & Okafor, 2019). The lack of institutional safeguards against harassment and violence in student politics further discourages female participation.

### **2.5.3 Psychological and Perceptual Barriers**

Female students often face fear of harassment, social stigma, or being labeled “unfeminine” if they seek leadership roles. This can lead to internalized doubts about their suitability for political engagement. Low self-efficacy, shaped by cultural stereotypes and past experiences of exclusion, diminishes women’s political ambitions (Lawal, 2013).

The perception that student politics is aggressive and dominated by males creates a psychological barrier for women, who may fear marginalization or being overwhelmed by

hostile competition. Such attitudes contribute to a lower level of active participation despite an expressed interest in politics.

#### **2.5.4 Peer Pressure and Campus Culture**

Peer influence is a powerful determinant of political behavior in universities. Male-dominated cliques and political groups often exclude or marginalize female students, limiting their access to networks and campaign resources (Mwangi, 2018). Stereotypes within peer groups can discourage women from running for office or participating actively.

Campus culture, sometimes tolerant of aggressive or violent political tactics, creates an environment where women feel unsafe or unwelcome in political leadership. Female students may experience resistance not only from male peers but also from other students who adhere to traditional gender norms.

#### **2.6 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is anchored on **Feminist Political Theory** and **Political Socialization Theory**. These theories collectively provide a comprehensive lens through which the low participation of female students in Nigerian university politics can be understood.

## **Feminist Political Theory**

Feminist Political Theory emerges from feminist scholarship that critiques traditional political theories for their exclusion of gender as a central category of analysis (Phillips, 1995; Young, 2000). It interrogates how patriarchal systems and male-dominated political structures perpetuate the marginalization of women within political spaces. The theory argues that politics, historically shaped by masculine norms and values, often systematically disadvantages women, limiting their access to power, leadership, and decision-making roles.

In the Nigerian context, where societal norms are heavily influenced by patriarchal cultural values, feminist political theory helps to explain why women, including female university students, face significant obstacles in political participation. For example, prevailing gender stereotypes position leadership as inherently masculine, while female ambition is frequently framed as unfeminine or socially unacceptable (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010). These deeply ingrained cultural narratives, reinforced by family, religious beliefs, and social institutions, create an environment where women's political involvement is discouraged or delegitimized.

Institutionally, universities often mirror these patriarchal power dynamics through gender-insensitive policies, male-dominated political networks, and a lack of mechanisms to support female leadership (Agbalajobi, 2010). Feminist Political Theory thus highlights the importance of recognizing and dismantling these structural barriers. It advocates for

gender-responsive reforms, including mentorship programs, inclusive electoral frameworks, and active efforts to challenge cultural stereotypes, as essential steps toward achieving gender equity in student politics.

Furthermore, feminist theory emphasizes the intersectionality of gender with other social identities such as ethnicity, class, and religion, which may compound barriers for some female students more than others (Crenshaw, 1989). This intersectional approach is crucial for understanding the diverse experiences of female students within Nigerian universities and for designing context-sensitive interventions that address multiple dimensions of exclusion.

### **Political Socialization Theory**

Political Socialization Theory, originally developed by Almond and Verba (1963), focuses on the processes through which individuals acquire their political beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors over time. Socialization agents such as family, peers, schools, media, and broader social institutions play a critical role in shaping political identity and participation. This theory is particularly relevant for analyzing the political engagement of university students because the campus environment represents a key stage where young adults refine their political consciousness and leadership aspirations.

In Nigerian universities, political socialization involves participation in student unions, engagement with political campaigns, and exposure to political debates and activism.

However, female students often encounter gendered socialization that restricts their political confidence and ambition. From early childhood, many Nigerian girls are socialized to prioritize domestic roles over public leadership, internalizing beliefs that politics is a male domain (Ezeani & Ugwu, 2019). On campus, these social expectations may be reinforced by peers and faculty, limiting female students' opportunities to develop political efficacy—the belief in their ability to influence political outcomes.

Moreover, political socialization theory explains how the presence or absence of role models and mentors significantly impacts political participation. Female students with access to mentors who encourage political involvement and provide guidance are more likely to engage actively in student politics (Nwankwo, 2015). Conversely, the lack of visible female leaders on campus perpetuates the perception that political leadership is unattainable for women, reinforcing cycles of exclusion.

The theory also underscores the importance of informal social networks and campus culture in shaping political behavior. Male-dominated political groups often control access to resources, information, and support, making it difficult for female students to break into these networks. This dynamic limits the opportunities for political learning and mobilization among women, as political socialization is often mediated through peer influence and group membership.

## **Integrative Perspective**

By integrating Feminist Political Theory and Political Socialization Theory, this study offers a nuanced and multidimensional understanding of the low participation of female students in Nigerian university politics. Feminist Political Theory highlights the macro-level structural and cultural constraints rooted in gender inequality, while Political Socialization Theory elucidates the micro-level processes through which female students develop—or are hindered from developing—political identities and participation behaviors.

This combined theoretical approach enables a comprehensive analysis that captures both the systemic power imbalances and the social learning processes that shape political participation. It helps identify not only the external barriers female students face but also internalized attitudes and perceptions shaped through socialization, which may discourage political engagement.

Ultimately, these theories provide a critical foundation for examining how universities can transform student political culture and structures to be more inclusive and supportive of female leadership.

## **2.7 Empirical Review**

Research on female political participation in university politics reveals persistent underrepresentation globally, with multiple studies highlighting similar barriers despite differing cultural contexts. Locally, Nigerian studies emphasize that socio-cultural norms deeply rooted in patriarchy continue to restrict women's political engagement on campuses (Agbalajobi, 2010; Arowolo & Aluko, 2010). These norms often manifest as gender stereotyping, family and peer discouragement, and fear of social stigma, which collectively deter female students from contesting leadership positions (Odejide, 2003).

Institutional barriers within universities, such as male-dominated political structures, lack of gender-sensitive policies, and limited mentorship opportunities, have also been widely documented (Agbalajobi, 2010). Research indicates that the absence of formal support systems for female political aspirants leads to unequal access to resources and political networks crucial for successful campaigns (Akinola, 2014).

Comparative studies from other African countries echo these findings, showing that cultural traditions and political violence further limit women's active participation in student politics (Kamau & Onyango, 2018). Internationally, research from Western and Asian contexts similarly reports that gendered socialization and political socialization processes contribute to lower female political participation rates, underscoring the global nature of these challenges (Fox & Lawless, 2014; Norris & Inglehart, 2001).

However, some studies point to the positive impact of targeted mentorship programs, gender-awareness campaigns, and institutional reforms in increasing female participation

(Kamau & Onyango, 2018; Ogundele, 2016). These findings suggest that while barriers are deeply entrenched, proactive strategies can create enabling environments for women's political empowerment in university settings.

Despite the growing body of literature, gaps remain in understanding the nuanced experiences of Nigerian female students in political leadership roles, especially in diverse university contexts. Few studies have employed mixed-method approaches to explore both the quantitative dimensions and qualitative experiences of female political engagement on campus.

## **2.8 Summary**

The literature reviewed in this chapter has established that female political participation, both globally and locally, is significantly hindered by a range of socio-cultural, institutional, and psychological barriers. Key studies underscore the persistence of patriarchal norms, gendered stereotypes, and structural inequalities that limit women's access to leadership roles across various spheres, including student politics. In the Nigerian context, the underrepresentation of female students in student union governments and other campus leadership structures mirrors broader national trends, where women occupy a disproportionately small share of political offices despite making up nearly half of the population.

Theoretical contributions such as Feminist Political Theory and Political Socialization Theory have provided valuable frameworks for understanding how systemic power imbalances and early exposure to political norms shape female students' political attitudes

and behaviors. Empirical findings, both local and international, have highlighted the importance of mentorship, supportive institutional environments, and inclusive political cultures in improving female representation. However, they also reveal significant gaps—particularly the lack of focused research on university-level political participation among Nigerian female students.

Despite the wealth of literature on gender and national politics, there is a dearth of scholarship that specifically explores the formative political experiences of women at the tertiary education level in Nigeria. Most studies concentrate on national or state-level elections, while relatively few examine how gendered power dynamics manifest in campus governance. Moreover, while existing research often outlines the barriers female students face, there is limited engagement with students' own perceptions, coping strategies, or suggested pathways toward inclusive participation.

This study addresses these gaps by focusing on the lived experiences, attitudes, and challenges of female students involved—or interested—in university politics. It aims to produce empirical data that not only highlight the structural and cultural barriers to participation but also inform practical interventions for gender-inclusive student governance. In doing so, the study contributes a crucial layer to the discourse on gender and democratic development in Nigeria, beginning with its future leaders.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodological framework employed in conducting this study. It describes the research design, population, sampling techniques, data collection methods, instruments, procedures, and the techniques used for data analysis. The methodology is designed to ensure that the research objectives are effectively addressed and that the data gathered are reliable, valid, and relevant to the central problem—examining the factors influencing the low participation of female students in Nigerian university politics.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

This study adopts a quantitative research design, specifically utilizing the survey method to investigate the factors influencing the low participation of female students in university politics. A structured questionnaire will be developed and administered to gather standardized data from respondents. This approach is suitable because it enables the collection of data from a relatively large population, allowing for statistical analysis and generalization of findings.

The standardized nature of the questionnaire enhances the objectivity, reliability, and comparability of responses across the selected sample. The data collected will be analyzed

to identify trends, correlations, and possible causal relationships relevant to the research objectives.

### **3.3 Population of the Study**

The population of this study comprises all female undergraduate students enrolled in UNIBEN during the 2024/2025 academic session.

Given the diversity of academic disciplines and levels of study, the population includes female students across various faculties, departments, and year groups. This ensures a broad representation of perspectives and experiences related to political engagement within the university context.

According to publicly available enrollment statistics, there are an estimated 42,000 undergraduate students and 18,000 female undergraduates at the University of Benin, representing approximately 43% of the overall student population. While specific gender-disaggregated data is limited, the study focuses exclusively on female students.

### **3.4 Sampling and Sampling Techniques**

The sample size will be 100 female undergraduate students. This will be obtained by using the proportionate stratified sampling technique. This involves dividing the population into distinct groups based on specific characteristics and selecting a random sample from each.

The characteristics in this context would be the various levels of female undergraduate students.

### **3.5 Research Instrument**

The primary research instrument for this study is a structured **questionnaire** designed to collect quantitative data from female undergraduate students at the University of Benin (UNIBEN).

The questionnaire is divided into four sections:

**Section A – Demographic Information:** Collects basic details such as faculty, department, level of study, and age group to enable analysis based on background variables.

**Section B – Political Awareness, Interest, and Participation:** Assesses female students' knowledge of university politics, sources of political information, general interest in political activities, and actual participation in political processes.

**Section C – Factors Influencing Participation:** Evaluates perceived barriers and enablers to female participation, such as cultural norms, academic workload, peer influence, and institutional support.

The questionnaire uses four-point Likert-scale items, being *Strongly Agree(SA)*, *Agree(A)*, *Disagree(D)*, and *Strongly Disagree(SD)* to ensure the utmost accuracy.

### **3.6 Validity of Research Instrument**

To ensure validity and reliability, the questionnaire was reviewed by the project supervisor, an expert in Political Science, for vetting, correction, and approval before being distributed to the respondents to ensure its content and construct validity.

### **3.7 Method of Data Collection**

Questionnaires will be administered in physical form during agreed-upon times, such as between or after courses. Where or when necessary, permission will be sought from the present authorities to facilitate access to students.

Students will be given clear instructions on how to complete the questionnaire, and their consent will be obtained before participation. Completed questionnaires will be collected immediately after completion to prevent loss of data and ensure confidentiality.

### **3.8 Method of Data Analysis**

Data from the questionnaires will be coded and analyzed using the **Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)**. Simple descriptive statistics, such as frequency count and simple percentages, will be used in presenting the findings of the research. The secondary data will be analyzed using thematic analysis.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyzes, and interprets the data collected from the field through the administration of structured questionnaires to female undergraduate students at the University of Benin (UNIBEN). This chapter aims to examine the factors influencing the low participation of female students in university politics, in line with the objectives and research question outlined in earlier chapters. A total of one hundred and fifty questionnaires were administered to the female respondents in UNIBEN.

#### 4.2 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents.

**Table 1: Showing Respondents' Status.**

STATUS		FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Female Students	Undergraduate	150	100

*Source: Field Survey, 2025.*

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of the respondents by status. 100% of the sample size are female undergraduate students.

**Table 2: Showing Respondents' Age**

<b>AGE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE (%)</b>
16-20	36	24
21-25	108	72
26-30	3	2
31 years and above	3	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2025.*

Table 2 illustrates the disparities in the age distribution of respondents. Respondents within the age range of 21-25 dominate the survey by 72%. 16 to 20-year-old respondents take up 24% and the minorities are older by a decade.

**Table 3: Showing Respondents' Level**

<b>LEVEL</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE (%)</b>
<b>100</b>	17	11.3
<b>200</b>	30	20
<b>300</b>	24	16
<b>400</b>	53	35.3
<b>500</b>	16	10.3
<b>OTHER</b>	10	6.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2025.*

According to Table 3, the majority of respondents are in the 400 level, with 35.33% and 20% in the 200 level. The lowest frequency is for the ‘other’ item, as it comprises undergraduate students with extra years and longer Bachelor's programs.

### 4.3 Analysis of Data from Survey (Field)

**Table 4: Political Awareness, Interest, and Participation**

S/N	ITEMS	NO	Agree (SA+A)	Agree (%)	Disagree (SD+D)	Disagree (%)
1.	I am aware of the student political activities and elections in UNIBEN.	150	114	76.0	36	24.0
2.	I am interested in student politics and governance.	150	78	52.0	72	48.0
3.	I have voted in student union elections before.	150	40	26.7	110	73.3
4.	I regularly attend or follow student political campaigns and debates.	150	75	50.0	75	50.0
5.	I have considered contesting for a leadership position in the university.	150	78	52.0	72	48.0

*Source: Field Survey, 2025.*

Table 4 reveals that while 76% of UNIBEN students are aware of student political activities, only 26.7% have ever voted, showing a clear gap between awareness and participation. About half (52%) expressed interest in student politics, yet many remain passive, with equal participation (50%) in campaigns and debates. Although 52% have

considered contesting for leadership roles, this interest rarely translates into actual involvement.

Overall, the data indicate high awareness but low participation, reflecting widespread apathy and disconnection from student politics. This highlights the need for stronger political sensitization, transparent electoral processes, and inclusive opportunities to encourage active engagement.

**Research Question 1:** How do socio-cultural norms affect female students’ participation in university politics?

**Table 5: Showing the responses of the impact of socio-cultural norms on female participation in university politics.**

S/N	ITEMS	NO	Agree (SA+A)	Agree (%)	Disagree (SD+D)	Disagree (%)
6.	Cultural or religious beliefs discourage female students from taking leadership roles.	150	79	52.0	71	48.0
7.	Many students believe that leadership roles are meant for men.	150	93	62.0	57	38.0
8.	Family expectations limit the time female students can devote to politics.	150	90	60.0	60	40.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 5 examines the influence of socio-cultural norms on female students' participation in university politics. The findings reveal that cultural and gender-based perceptions continue to shape students' attitudes toward female leadership.

Slightly more than half of the respondents (52%) agreed that cultural or religious beliefs discourage female students from contesting leadership positions. This indicates that traditional and religious expectations still influence women's political behavior and confidence despite modernization. Furthermore, 62% of respondents agreed that leadership roles are often seen as the domain of men—a reflection of the persistent patriarchal mindset within the university environment. Such perceptions reinforce gender stereotypes and restrict women's access to political opportunities.

Overall, the findings suggest that socio-cultural norms remain a key barrier to female participation in university politics. Deep-rooted gender biases, cultural conservatism, and family pressures collectively reduce women's visibility and involvement in campus governance. Universities should therefore promote awareness programs that challenge stereotypes, encourage inclusivity, and strengthen female leadership initiatives.

**Research Question 2:** How do institutional factors influence female students’ involvement in student politics?

**Table 6: Distribution of responses on the effects of institutional factors on female students’ involvement in student politics.**

S/N	ITEMS	NO	Agree (SA+A)	Agree (%)	Disagree (SD+D)	Disagree (%)
9.	The university lacks policies that promote female inclusivity in politics.	150	75	50.0	75	50.0
10.	Female candidates receive little support from school authorities.	150	93	62.0	57	38.0
11.	The student political structure is not gender-sensitive.	150	99	66.0	51	34.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 6 shows that half of the respondents (50%) agreed that the university lacks policies promoting female inclusivity in student politics, showing institutional indifference toward gender balance. A larger proportion (62%) believed that female candidates receive little support from school authorities, suggesting limited encouragement or structural backing for women in leadership. Most respondents (66%) agreed that the student political structure is not gender-sensitive, indicating that existing systems may favor male participation or overlook women’s specific challenges.

The data reveal that institutional barriers — including lack of supportive policies, weak administrative encouragement, and gender-insensitive structures — significantly hinder female students’ participation in university politics. These factors perpetuate inequality and deter women from pursuing leadership positions.

**Research Question 3:** What role does political mentorship and leadership training play in encouraging female students to participate in student politics?

**Table 7: Distribution of Responses on the Effects of Institutional Factors on Female Students’ Involvement in Student Politics**

S/N	ITEMS	NO	Agree (SA+A)	Agree (%)	Disagree (SD+D)	Disagree (%)
12.	Female students rarely have access to political mentors and role models.	150	78	52.0	72	48.0
13.	Leadership training programs for female students are inadequate.	150	96	64.0	54	36.0
14.	Mentorship and training increase students’ confidence to participate in politics.	150	129	86.0	21	14.0

*Source: Field Survey, 2025.*

Table 7 examines the influence of institutional factors—particularly mentorship and leadership training—on female students’ participation in university politics. The results show that 52% of respondents believe female students rarely have access to political mentors or role models, while 64% agree that leadership training programs are inadequate.

These findings highlight institutional shortcomings that limit women’s exposure to political guidance and skill development.

However, a significant 86% agreed that mentorship and training increase students’ confidence to participate in politics, underscoring their importance in encouraging active involvement. Overall, the data suggest that effective mentorship and structured leadership programs can bridge existing gender gaps by equipping female students with the confidence and competence to take on political roles within the university.

**Research Question 4:** In what ways do peer perceptions and gender-based stereotypes influence female students’ willingness to contest for leadership positions?

**Table 8: Distribution of Responses on the Influence of Peer Perceptions and Gender-Based Stereotypes on Female Students’ Willingness to Contest Leadership Positions**

S/N	ITEMS	NO	Agree (SA+A)	Agree (%)	Disagree (SD+D)	Disagree (%)
15.	Female students who participate in politics are often criticized by their peers.	150	84	56.0	66	44.0
16.	Some students see female leaders as aggressive or unfeminine.	150	78	52.0	72	48.0
17.	Negative peer perception discourages women from contesting in elections.	150	114	76.0	36	24.0
18.	Student politics in UNIBEN is dominated by male students.	150	120	80.0	30	20.0

<b>19.</b>	Student politics is too aggressive and competitive for female participation.	150	72	48.0	78	52.0
<b>20.</b>	Women can perform effectively in student political leadership roles.	150	138	92.0	12	8.0

*Source: Field Survey, 2025.*

Table 8 examines how peer perceptions and gender-based stereotypes affect female students' willingness to engage in university politics. The findings reveal that social judgment and entrenched gender norms continue to undermine women's participation. Over half (56%) of respondents agreed that female students involved in politics are criticized by peers, while 52% said female leaders are seen as "aggressive" or "unfeminine." These responses reflect persistent stereotypes that equate leadership assertiveness with masculinity, discouraging women from seeking political roles.

A notable 76% agreed that negative peer perception deters women from contesting in elections, showing that peer attitudes form a strong social barrier to inclusion. Furthermore, 80% believe student politics at UNIBEN is dominated by men, reinforcing the gender imbalance in representation and influence. Although only 48% agreed that politics is "too aggressive" for women, this perception still underscores how competitiveness is gender-coded as male.

Encouragingly, 92% of respondents affirmed that women can perform effectively in leadership roles—signaling a gradual shift in attitudes toward women's competence and political potential.

**Research Question 5:** What measures can promote greater participation of female students in university politics?

**Table 9: Distribution of Responses on Measures That Would Promote Greater Participation of Female Students in University Politics**

S/N	ITEMS	NO	Agree (SA+A)	Agree (%)	Disagree (SD+D)	Disagree (%)
21.	Establishing mentorship programs connecting female students with experienced political leaders would encourage participation.	150	132	88.0	18	12.0
22.	Organizing leadership and capacity-building workshops for female students would boost their confidence in contesting elections.	150	126	84.0	24	16.0
23.	Introducing university policies that ensure gender balance in student leadership positions would enhance inclusivity.	150	120	80.0	30	20.0
24.	Creating awareness campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes would increase support for female candidates.	150	111	74.0	39	26.0
25.	Providing financial and logistical support for female candidates would promote greater political participation.	150	105	70.0	45	30.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 9 examines possible measures to promote greater participation of female students in university politics. The results show strong support for initiatives that empower and

encourage women to take on leadership roles. A significant 88% of respondents agreed that mentorship programs connecting female students with experienced political leaders would enhance participation, underscoring the importance of role models in shaping political ambition and confidence. Similarly, 84% agreed that leadership and capacity-building workshops would boost female students' readiness to contest in elections, highlighting the need for institutional investment in training and skill development.

Furthermore, 80% of respondents supported the introduction of gender-balance policies in student leadership structures, emphasizing the demand for inclusivity and representation. Awareness campaigns aimed at challenging gender stereotypes also received substantial approval (74%), suggesting that shifting perceptions remains key to achieving gender equity in student politics. Lastly, 70% agreed that providing financial and logistical support for female candidates would reduce barriers related to campaign costs and resource limitations.

Overall, the findings indicate that mentorship, leadership training, supportive policies, awareness efforts, and financial assistance are essential measures for improving women's participation in university politics. These strategies collectively address both structural and social barriers, fostering a more inclusive and equitable political environment within the university.

#### **4.4 Discussion of Findings**

This section presents a detailed discussion of the findings from the data collected through questionnaires on “**An Examination of the Factors Influencing Low Participation of Female Students in University Politics.**” The discussion interprets the responses from participants and links them to the study’s objectives, highlighting how socio-cultural norms, institutional factors, peer perceptions, and leadership opportunities shape female students’ engagement in university politics, and the ways to influence greater participation.

##### **Awareness and Level of Participation in University Politics**

Findings from Table 4 show that awareness of student political activities among UNIBEN students is considerably high, with 76% of respondents acknowledging that they are aware of political activities and elections within the university. The low rate of electoral participation (26.7%) is particularly concerning, as voting remains the most direct and measurable form of political engagement. This finding suggests that many students either feel alienated from the process or perceive student elections as predetermined. It may also highlight deficiencies in voter education and mobilization within the university environment.

The moderate level of interest (52%) recorded among respondent’s points to a growing sense of political apathy, possibly influenced by perceptions of favoritism, corruption, and lack of transparency in student leadership. These attitudes reflect a broader trend in national

politics, where citizens are aware but disengaged from participation due to distrust in political systems.

Furthermore, only half of the respondents reported participating in political campaigns or debates, and a similar proportion (52%) conveyed interest in contesting leadership positions. This indicates that aspiration does not always translate into involvement, especially for female students who may face additional barriers such as social disapproval, intimidation, or lack of institutional encouragement.

Generally, the findings imply that despite increasing awareness, active participation among female students remains limited. This supports earlier studies that emphasize the need for civic sensitization, mentorship, and inclusive student governance structures to promote meaningful political engagement among young women.

### **The Impact of Socio-Cultural Norms on Female Participation**

The data presented in Table 5 provide compelling empirical evidence that socio-cultural norms constitute a significant barrier to female students' participation in university politics in Nigeria. The findings across all three items reveal a pervasive cultural environment that systematically discourages and limits women's political ambitions and engagement.

The most striking finding is from Item 7, where a strong majority of respondents (62%) agreed that “Many students believe that leadership roles are meant for men”. This statistic is a direct reflection of the deep-seated patriarchal norms critiqued by Feminist Political

Theory. As argued by Arowolo & Aluko (2010), leadership is culturally construed as a masculine trait in many Nigerian contexts. This belief is not a passive opinion but an active ideological force that shapes perceptions of competence and suitability. When leadership is implicitly defined as a male domain, female candidates are automatically viewed as interlopers or as less competent, a phenomenon confirmed by the study of Ifeanyi and Okafor (2019), which found that women candidates were often seen as “too emotional” for leadership.

This result underscores how the university political arena, rather than being an isolated space, mirrors the broader national political culture of Nigeria, where, as noted in the literature, cultural norms often “associate leadership with masculinity and relegate women to domestic and supportive roles” (Okeke-Ihejirika & Franceschet, 2002). The fact that this belief is held by a majority of the student body creates a formidable “psychological and perceptual barrier” (Lawal, 2013), as female students must contend not only with their own internalized doubts but also with the widespread perception of their inherent unsuitability.

Item 6 shows that 52% of respondents agree that “Cultural or religious beliefs discourage female students from taking leadership roles.” While this percentage is slightly lower than the others, it is critically important because it points to the sanctioning mechanisms that enforce gender norms. As the literature notes, “patriarchal religious interpretations—both Islamic and Christian—reinforce these gendered expectations” (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010). These beliefs provide a moral and social justification for excluding women from the public-

political sphere, framing their participation as a deviation from propriety and “feminine behavior.”

The near-even split (52% Agree vs. 48% Disagree) on this item is itself a significant finding. It suggests a cultural contestation within the university environment. While a slight majority still feels the weight of these prohibitive beliefs, a large minority appears to reject them. This divergence could reflect generational shifts, differences in regional or ethnic backgrounds, or varying levels of exposure to feminist and gender-equity discourses. It highlights that the socio-cultural landscape is not monolithic, offering potential entry points for intervention through gender-awareness campaigns.

The finding from Item 8, where 60% of respondents agreed that “Family expectations limit the time female students can devote to politics,” illuminates a practical and structural manifestation of patriarchy. This goes beyond attitudes and beliefs to directly impact behavior and capacity. Political Socialization Theory explains how, from an early age, “girls and young women are socialized to prioritize domestic roles” (Agbalajobi, 2010). These expectations do not vanish at the university gate; they follow female students, demanding their time and emotional labor for family obligations.

This creates a tangible resource gap. While male students can dedicate uninterrupted time to networking, campaigning, and attending political meetings, female students may be expected to fulfill familial duties, thus limiting their availability. This aligns with Eze and Oji’s (2017) observation that male-dominated networks control political resources, of

which time is one of the most critical. The inability to devote sufficient time directly hinders a female student's ability to build a viable campaign, effectively excluding her from the political process before she even formally declares her candidacy.

Collectively, these findings paint a picture of a socio-cultural ecosystem that is overwhelmingly hostile to female political ambition. The norms work on three interconnected levels:

**Ideological:** Convincing both men and women that leadership is male (Item 7).

**Moral:** Discouraging participation through cultural and religious sanctions (Item 6).

**Practical:** Families limiting the resources (time) needed to participate (Item 8).

As Oduwole and Oni (2013) found, “while female students may be politically aware and even interested, they are less likely to transition into active participation due to socio-cultural... barriers.” The data in Table 5 provides the empirical evidence for precisely how these barriers operate, confirming the theoretical frameworks of Feminist Political Theory (which highlights the structural and ideological constraints) and Political Socialization Theory (which explains how these constraints are internalized and enacted).

Therefore, addressing female underrepresentation requires more than just encouraging individual women; it demands a concerted effort to challenge and transform the deeply embedded socio-cultural norms that govern the entire university political space.

## **The Influence of Institutional Factors on Female Involvement**

The data in Table 6 reveal that institutional factors within the university environment play a decisive and profoundly negative role in shaping female students' involvement in student politics. The responses point to a systemic failure to create a level playing field, with the student political structure itself being identified as the primary barrier.

The result for Item 9 is particularly telling: a perfect 50/50 split on whether “The university lacks policies that promote female inclusivity in politics.” This division suggests a critical ambiguity. It could indicate that while formal gender policies might exist on paper (e.g., a non-discrimination clause), their practical application and visibility are so limited that half the student body perceives a complete void. This aligns with the literature, which notes that universities “often lack explicit gender-sensitive policies or frameworks” (Agbalajobi, 2010). The split opinion likely reflects the gap between symbolic policy and tangible, felt impact on campus.

However, this perceived institutional neutrality is sharply contradicted by the response to Item 10, where a strong majority (62%) agrees that “Female candidates receive little support from school authorities.” This indicates that, regardless of official policy, the de facto institutional practice is one of non-support. This lack of active sponsorship from authority figures—such as faculty advisors or student affairs deans—creates a significant vacuum. Without this institutional backing, female aspirants are left exposed and without the legitimacy or resources needed to challenge entrenched interests, a point underscored

by research highlighting the “lack of internal party democracy” at the national level (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010).

The most conclusive finding comes from Item 11, where two-thirds of respondents (66%) agree that “The student political structure is not gender-sensitive.” This is the most damning indictment of the institutional environment. It confirms that the problem is not merely a lack of add-on policies, but that the very architecture of student politics is fundamentally biased.

This structure, as described in the literature, is characterized by "male-dominated political networks that control political resources, endorsements, and campaign financing" (Eze & Oji, 2017). The "gender-insensitive" nature of this structure means its rules, culture, and operational modes are built around masculine norms of competition and aggression, which can marginalize female participants. It creates an environment where, as Ifeanyi and Okafor (2019) found, women face intense scrutiny and harassment, and where the absence of "institutional safeguards" makes participation a high-risk endeavor.

The findings from Table 6 demonstrate a clear institutional logic: the university, through its passive stance (Item 9) and active non-support (Item 10), effectively permits the existence of a student political structure that is inherently biased against women (Item 11). This creates a system where female students must navigate a political arena that is not designed for them and from which they receive little official protection or encouragement.

This institutional failure directly replicates the “structural barriers” seen in Nigerian national politics, such as “entrenched godfatherism” and a lack of “internal party democracy”. Therefore, simply encouraging more women to run for office is insufficient. The data argues for a fundamental institutional reform—making the political structure itself more gender-sensitive through measures like enforced codes of conduct, campaign financing rules that support female candidates, and formal mentorship programs to compensate for the lack of organic support. Without such structural changes, institutional factors will continue to be a major deterrent to female political participation on campus.

### **The Pivotal Role of Political Mentorship and Leadership Training**

The data in Table 7 simultaneously confirms a critical deficiency in mentorship and training for female students while also highlighting these very factors as the most potent potential catalysts for their political participation.

The responses to Item 12 reveal a nearly even split, with 52% agreeing that “Female students rarely have access to political mentors and role models.” This slight majority points to a significant void. The absence of visible female leaders, as noted in the literature, “perpetuates the perception that political leadership is unattainable for women” (Nwankwo, 2015). Without mentors who have successfully navigated the male-dominated political terrain, female students lack crucial guides, sponsors, and living proof that success is possible. The 48% disagreement, however, suggests that access is not uniformly absent

and may exist in isolated pockets or specific departments, indicating an opportunity for targeted expansion.

This scarcity is compounded by the clear consensus on Item 13, where 64% of respondents find that “Leadership training programs for female students are inadequate.” This points to a systemic institutional failing. The literature identifies the “absence of visible female role models and mentorship programs” as a key barrier (Ifeanyi & Okafor, 2019). This finding confirms that even where such initiatives may exist, they are perceived as insufficient in scale, quality, or reach to meet the needs of the student population. This inadequacy leaves female students without the tailored skills—such as public speaking, campaign strategy, and network-building—required to compete effectively.

The most striking finding in the entire dataset comes from Item 14. An overwhelming 86% of respondents agree that “Mentorship and training increase students’ confidence to participate in politics.” This near-unanimous belief underscores the transformative potential of these interventions. It directly supports the Political Socialization Theory, which posits that access to mentors and supportive learning environments is critical for developing political efficacy—the belief in one’s ability to influence political outcomes.

This finding powerfully connects to the psychological barriers discussed in the literature, such as “low self-efficacy” and “internalized doubts” (Lawal, 2013). The student body itself identifies mentorship and training as the primary antidote to these confidence gaps.

It suggests that providing these resources is not a peripheral activity but a central strategy for disrupting the cycle of exclusion.

The stark contrast between the identified need (Items 12 & 13) and the recognized solution (Item 14) is the central insight of this data. Students are acutely aware that a lack of mentorship and training is a major impediment, and they overwhelmingly believe that rectifying this lack is the key to unlocking greater female participation.

This creates a clear and actionable mandate for university administration and student affairs departments. The findings affirm that while socio-cultural and institutional barriers are formidable, they are not insurmountable. Proactive investment in structured, well-funded, and visible mentorship programs and leadership training—precisely the “targeted mentorship programs” and “gender-awareness campaigns” suggested by scholars like Kamau & Onyango (2018)—is identified by the students themselves as the most effective pathway forward. By bridging this gap between the current inadequacy and the proven potential of mentorship and training, universities can directly foster the confidence and skills needed for a more inclusive political landscape.

## **The Dwelling Effect of Peer Perceptions and Stereotypes**

The data in Table 8 reveal a profound and complex social environment where peer perceptions and gender-based stereotypes create a powerful deterrent to female political participation, even in the face of overwhelming belief in women's capabilities.

The findings from Items 15 and 16 establish that female students who engage in politics pay a social price. A majority (56%) agree that these women are “often criticized by their peers,” and 52% agree that female leaders are seen as “aggressive or unfeminine.” This directly reflects the socio-cultural barriers described in the literature, where women in politics are perceived as “deviating from traditional gender roles” (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010). This labeling serves as a social sanction, punishing women for stepping outside prescribed norms and creating a powerful disincentive. The fear of being ostracized or stigmatized is a significant psychological barrier, as noted by Lawal (2013).

The most critical findings that contextualize the above are in Items 17 and 18. An overwhelming 76% of respondents acknowledge that “Negative peer perception discourages women from contesting,” and a striking 80% confirm that “Student politics in UNIBEN is dominated by male students.” These two results are intrinsically linked. The male domination (Item 18) creates a political culture and set of norms that are perceived as the default. When women attempt to enter this space, their deviation from this male norm is what often leads to the negative peer perceptions (Items 15 & 16), which in turn actively

discourage participation (Item 17). This creates a self-perpetuating cycle of exclusion, where male dominance is both the cause and effect of the gendered barriers.

The data present a crucial paradox. Item 19 shows that the notion that “Student politics is too aggressive and competitive for female participation” is rejected by a slight majority (52%). This suggests that students do not inherently believe women are incapable of handling the demands of politics. This is powerfully reinforced by Item 20, where a near-unanimous 92% agree that “Women can perform effectively in student political leadership roles”.

This creates a critical insight: The primary barrier is not a belief in female incompetence, but the social repercussions of participating in a male-dominated sphere. Students largely believe women are capable leaders, but they also recognize that the social costs and gendered criticisms associated with entering that arena are a major deterrent. This aligns with the concept of “peer pressure and campus culture” as a powerful determinant of political behavior, where male-dominated groups can marginalize female students (Mwangi, 2018).

The findings paint a picture of a political culture where the path to leadership for women is fraught with social, rather than competency-based, challenges. While there is strong faith in women's abilities (92%), the reality of a male-dominated structure (80%) and the negative peer perceptions it fosters (76% discouragement) create a “chilling effect” that suppresses female ambition.

This underscores the need for interventions that go beyond capacity-building. The solution lies in actively transforming the peer culture and political environment itself. This requires challenging the gendered stereotypes that label ambitious women as “aggressive,” promoting positive and visible female role models to normalize their presence, and implementing institutional reforms that break up male-dominated networks and make political competition safer and more inclusive. The battle is not to prove women's capability, which the data shows is already acknowledged, but to dismantle the social sanctions that punish them for acting on it.

### **A Roadmap for Increased Participation**

The data in Table 9 provides a clear and compelling consensus from the student body on the specific, actionable measures needed to dismantle the barriers to female political participation. The responses form a coherent strategy that moves from building individual capacity to reforming institutional structures and, finally, to transforming the underlying cultural environment.

The two most strongly endorsed measures are Item 21 (88% Agree) on establishing mentorship programs and Item 22 (84% Agree) on organizing leadership workshops. This overwhelming support directly addresses the critical gaps identified in previous findings, particularly the lack of role models (Table 7) and low political confidence (linked to psychological barriers). Students recognize that to navigate the hostile, male-dominated political terrain, female students need guided support and skill development. This aligns

perfectly with the literature; Nwankwo (2015) emphasized that access to mentors significantly increases engagement, while Kamau & Onyango (2018) pointed to the positive impact of such targeted programs. These interventions are seen as the essential first step to equip women with the tools, networks, and self-belief to compete.

The second tier of solutions focuses on changing the rules of the game. A strong majority (80% on Item 23) supports introducing university policies to ensure gender balance, such as quotas or reserved seats. This is a direct response to the perception of a gender-insensitive political structure (Table 6, Item 11) and male domination (Table 8, Item 18). It indicates that students see voluntary measures as insufficient and believe proactive institutional enforcement is necessary to break the cycle of exclusion. This mirrors the recommendation of the National Gender Policy (2006) and feminist advocacy for structural change.

Furthermore, a significant 70% (Item 25) agree that providing financial and logistical support is crucial. This measure directly counteracts the resource gap that favors male-dominated networks, a key structural barrier identified by Eze & Oji (2017). By leveling the financial playing field, the university can mitigate one of the most practical and entrenched advantages enjoyed by male candidates.

While receiving slightly lower but still strong support (74% Agree on Item 24), creating awareness campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes is a critical component. This measure targets the root cause of the socio-cultural and peer perception barriers detailed in Table 8.

The data suggests students understand that long-term change requires shifting the underlying attitudes that label female leaders as “aggressive” and discourage their participation. This aligns with Feminist Political Theory, which advocates for active efforts to challenge cultural narratives that delegitimize women's political ambition (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010).

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This study was initiated to diagnose the factors behind the persistent underrepresentation of female students in the political arena of Nigerian universities, with a specific focus on the University of Benin (UNIBEN). It proceeded from the observation that while female enrollment in universities has risen, this parity does not extend to student governance, which remains a male-dominated sphere. The research sought to move beyond merely identifying this gap by empirically investigating the root causes and proposing evidence-based solutions. This chapter synthesizes the entire research journey, drawing conclusive insights from the findings and culminating in actionable recommendations for policymakers, university administrators, and student bodies.

#### **5.2 Summary**

The research journey began by establishing that the gender imbalance in national Nigerian politics is replicated within university campuses, where student politics acts as a critical training ground for future leaders. The core problem was identified as a significant disconnect between female students' presence in the university population and their visibility in elected leadership roles, driven by a complex web of barriers rather than a lack of interest or capability.

A thorough review of existing literature provided the theoretical foundation, framing the issue through the dual lenses of Feminist Political Theory and Political Socialization Theory. This revealed that female students' participation is constrained by deep-seated socio-cultural norms that label leadership as masculine, institutional structures that are insensitive to gender, and a pervasive campus culture that subjects politically active women to criticism and stereotyping.

To investigate these dynamics empirically, a quantitative survey was conducted with 150 female undergraduates at UNIBEN. The findings confirmed a stark awareness-to-action gap, with high awareness of student politics (76%) failing to translate into substantial electoral participation (26.7%). The data further underscored the powerful influence of socio-cultural norms, with a majority of respondents agreeing that leadership is seen as a male preserve (62%) and that family duties limit their political engagement (60%). Institutionally, the student political structure was widely perceived as non-inclusive (66%) and unsupported by university authorities (62%). A critical finding was the near-unanimous agreement (86%) on the transformative potential of mentorship and training, which was starkly contrasted by the current inadequacy of such programs (64%).

Ultimately, the study concluded that the primary barrier is not a belief in female incompetence—as 92% of respondents affirmed women's effectiveness in leadership—but the social and institutional sanctions they face for entering a male-dominated political space. The research successfully identified a clear roadmap for intervention, with

respondents strongly endorsing mentorship, capacity-building workshops, gender-balance policies, and financial support as key measures to foster inclusivity.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

This study concludes that the low participation of female students in university politics is not a result of a single factor but rather a complex interplay of multiple barriers. Firstly, socio-cultural norms continue to exert significant influence, with patriarchal attitudes positioning leadership as inherently masculine and religious beliefs reinforcing traditional gender roles. The perception that leadership is meant for men, held by 62% of respondents, creates a psychological barrier that discourages female political ambition.

Secondly, institutional factors present substantial obstacles. The student political structure is perceived as gender-insensitive by the majority of respondents, while the lack of supportive policies and inadequate administrative support for female candidates further exacerbates the situation. These institutional gaps create an environment where female students must navigate political systems not designed to accommodate their participation.

Thirdly, the absence of adequate mentorship and leadership training represents a critical missing link. While 86% of respondents recognized the value of such programs in building political confidence, the current inadequacy of these initiatives leaves female students without crucial guidance and skill development opportunities necessary for effective political engagement.

Furthermore, peer perceptions and campus culture create a challenging environment for aspiring female leaders. The findings reveal that negative peer perception discourages female participation, with many respondents reporting that female students in politics face criticism and stereotyping. The male-dominated nature of student politics, acknowledged by 80% of respondents, reinforces these exclusionary dynamics.

Despite these challenges, the study reveals a strong belief in women's leadership capabilities, with 92% of respondents affirming that women can perform effectively in political roles. This indicates that the primary barrier is not competency but rather the structural and cultural constraints that limit opportunity.

In essence, the underrepresentation of female students in university politics stems from deeply embedded socio-cultural norms, institutional inadequacies, limited mentorship opportunities, and exclusionary campus political culture. Addressing this challenge requires a comprehensive approach that simultaneously targets these multiple dimensions of exclusion to create a more inclusive political environment in Nigerian universities.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance female students' participation in university politics:

### **5.4.1 Recommendations to University Management**

**Implement Gender-Sensitive Policies:** The university should introduce and enforce policies that mandate gender balance in student leadership positions. This could include reserving a certain percentage of elective positions for female students or requiring that both genders are represented on candidate lists.

**Establish Formal Mentorship Programs:** Create structured mentorship programs that connect female students with experienced political figures, alumnae leaders, and female faculty members. These programs should focus on building political skills, confidence, and networks.

**Provide Financial Support:** Institute a special fund to support female candidates' campaign expenses, reducing the financial barrier that prevents many women from contesting elections.

**Enforce Safe Political Environment:** Develop and implement strict codes of conduct against harassment, violence, and gender-based discrimination in student politics, with clear reporting mechanisms and consequences for violations.

#### **5.4.2 Recommendations to Student Affairs Division**

**Organize Capacity-Building Workshops:** Conduct regular leadership training, public speaking, and campaign management workshops specifically designed for female students interested in politics.

**Launch Gender Awareness Campaigns:** Initiate campus-wide campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes and highlight the achievements of female leaders, both within and outside the university.

**Create Female Political Networks:** Facilitate the formation of networks and forums where female students interested in politics can connect, share experiences, and support each other's political ambitions.

#### **5.4.3 Recommendations to the Student Union Government**

**Reform Electoral Processes:** Review and amend electoral guidelines to ensure they are gender-sensitive and provide equal opportunities for female candidates.

**Promote Internal Gender Equity:** Within the student union, ensure that committee appointments and leadership opportunities are distributed equitably between male and female students.

**Establish Female Leadership Caucus:** Create a dedicated caucus within the student union to address gender-specific issues and mentor aspiring female politicians.

#### **5.4.4 Recommendations for Future Research**

**Longitudinal Studies:** Future research should track the political trajectories of female student leaders after graduation to understand the long-term impact of university political participation.

**Comparative Studies:** Conduct comparative studies across different Nigerian universities to identify institution-specific barriers and successful interventions.

**Qualitative Exploration:** Further qualitative research is needed to deeply explore the lived experiences, coping strategies, and leadership approaches of female students in political roles.

#### **5.4.5 Recommendations to Government and Educational Bodies**

**National Policy Framework:** The National Universities Commission should develop a framework for gender inclusion in student politics across all Nigerian universities.

**Funding Support:** Government agencies and educational foundations should provide grants to universities that implement successful female political participation programs.

These recommendations, if implemented collectively, can create a more inclusive political environment that empowers female students to fully participate in university governance and develop the leadership skills necessary for broader societal impact.

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

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire is designed to explore the **factors influencing the low participation of female students in Nigerian university politics**, using the University of Benin as a case study. Your responses will be used solely for academic research purposes and will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Kindly respond to the best of your ability by ticking (✓) where applicable.

**Section A: Demographic Information**

**(Please tick [✓] the appropriate option that best reflects your opinion for each item)**

1. Faculty: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Department: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Level of Study:
  - 100 Level ( )
  - 200 Level ( )
  - 300 Level ( )
  - Final Year or Other ( )

4. Age Range:

- 16–20 years ( )
- 21–25 years ( )
- 26–30 years ( )
- 31 years and above ( )

5. Are you currently a member of any student organization?

- Yes ( )
- No ( )

**Section B: Political Awareness, Interest, and Participation**

**(Please tick [✓] the appropriate item that best reflects your opinion for each item)**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
1.	I am aware of the student political activities and elections in UNIBEN.				
2.	I am interested in student politics and governance.				
3.	I have voted in student union elections before.				
4.	I regularly attend or follow student political campaigns and debates.				
5.	I have considered contesting for a leadership position in the university.				

**Section C: Factors Influencing Participation**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
	<b>How do socio-cultural norms affect female students' participation in university politics?</b>				
6.	Cultural or religious beliefs discourage female students from taking leadership roles.				
7.	Many students believe that leadership roles are meant for men.				
8.	Family expectations limit the time female students can devote to politics.				
	<b>How do institutional factors influence female students' involvement in student politics?</b>				
9.	The university lacks policies that promote female inclusivity in politics.				
10.	Female candidates receive little support from school authorities.				
11.	The student political structure is not gender-sensitive.				
	<b>What role does political mentorship and leadership training play in encouraging female students to participate in student politics?</b>				
12.	Female students rarely have access to political mentors and role models.				
13.	Leadership training programs for female students are inadequate.				
14.	Mentorship and training increase students' confidence to participate in politics.				

	<b>In what ways do peer perceptions and gender-based stereotypes influence female students' willingness to contest for leadership positions?</b>				
<b>15.</b>	Female students who participate in politics are often criticized by their peers.				
<b>16.</b>	Some students see female leaders as aggressive or unfeminine.				
<b>17.</b>	Negative peer perception discourages women from contesting in elections.				
<b>18.</b>	Student politics in UNIBEN is dominated by male students.				
<b>19.</b>	Student politics is too aggressive and competitive for female participation.				
<b>20.</b>	Women can perform effectively in student political leadership roles.				

#### **Section D: Suggestions for Improvement**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>ITEMS</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>21.</b>	Establishing mentorship programs connecting female students with experienced political leaders would encourage participation.				
<b>22.</b>	Organizing leadership and capacity-building workshops for female students would boost their confidence in contesting elections.				
<b>23.</b>	Introducing university policies that ensure gender balance in student leadership positions				

	would enhance inclusivity.				
<b>24.</b>	Creating awareness campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes would increase support for female candidates.				
<b>25.</b>	Providing financial and logistical support for female candidates would promote greater political participation.				