

Gender Inequality and Women's Political Participation in Taraba State

GRACE ALIDU EKIN¹, MIAPYEN BUHARI SHEHU²

¹Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolutions, Taraba State University, Jalingo

²Department of Political Science and International Relations, Taraba State University, Jalingo

Abstract- *Gender inequality remains a pervasive global issue that continues to shape political, social, and economic structures, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria. The objective of this study is to examine the extent and nature of gender inequality and its implications for women's political participation in Taraba State. Specifically, the research investigates women's representation in government and non-governmental sectors and their involvement in political parties and other political activities within the state. Adopting a qualitative methodology, the study draws data from secondary sources including books, journals, official reports, and credible online publications. The Classic Democratic Theory, developed by Dye and Zaiyler (1972), serves as the theoretical framework, emphasizing popular participation, equality, and representative governance. Findings reveal that women's representation in political offices and decision-making structures in Taraba State remains significantly low due to socio-cultural constraints, patriarchal dominance, financial barriers, political violence, and lack of institutional support. However, initiatives by NGOs and advocacy groups have made some progress in empowering women, though cultural resistance and weak policy implementation continue to limit their impact. The study recommends the adoption of affirmative action policies and gender quotas to improve female representation in governance, as well as the establishment of economic empowerment and leadership development programs for women. Addressing these barriers is essential to promoting gender-inclusive governance and achieving sustainable development in Taraba State and beyond.*

Keywords: *Gender Inequality, Politics, Women's Political Participation, Taraba State*

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality remains a pervasive issue globally, shaping socio-economic and political landscapes despite numerous international frameworks advocating for equality, such as the Beijing

Declaration (1995) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Women continue to face underrepresentation in political, economic, and social spheres. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2023), women hold only 26.7% of parliamentary seats worldwide, reflecting significant disparities in political representation. This inequality is perpetuated by structural, cultural, and institutional barriers that hinder women's full participation in decision-making processes, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, where patriarchal norms and systemic discrimination are deeply entrenched.

In Africa, the narrative of gender inequality is multifaceted. Countries such as Rwanda and South Africa have made notable progress in enhancing women's political participation, yet others continue to grapple with socio-cultural, economic, and institutional impediments. UN Women (2023) identifies factors such as limited access to education, economic disempowerment, and patriarchal structures as key challenges. These barriers not only marginalize women but also impede democratic governance by excluding diverse perspectives from policymaking.

Nigeria's experience reflects these broader trends. Despite women constituting nearly half of the population, their political representation remains disproportionately low. The National Bureau of Statistics (2020) reports that women occupied only 6.6% of elected positions during the 2019 general elections. Discriminatory laws, cultural norms, political violence, high campaign costs, and inadequate party support contribute to this marginalization (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010).

In subnational contexts like Taraba State, these challenges are even more pronounced. Located in

Nigeria's Middle Belt, Taraba State's diverse ethnic and religious composition adds complexity to gender dynamics. Traditional patriarchal systems dominate the social fabric, relegating women to subordinate roles and limiting their participation in public affairs (Abdulraheem et al., 2021). Cultural practices favoring male leadership, coupled with low levels of education and economic empowerment among women, further entrench gender inequality. Institutional weaknesses, such as the absence of gender-sensitive policies and political will, exacerbate the problem.

Nonetheless, various stakeholders, including NGOs, civil society groups, and international organizations, have initiated programs aimed at empowering women in Taraba State. Awareness campaigns, capacity-building workshops, and advocacy efforts have been employed to promote gender-inclusive governance. However, entrenched cultural norms, limited institutional support, poor coordination, and inadequate funding have hindered the impact of these initiatives (Omoniyi & Omosehin, 2019).

The exclusion of women from political leadership has far-reaching implications, not only for women but also for the broader development of Taraba State. Research indicates that increased women's political representation correlates with more inclusive policies, especially in sectors like education, health, and social welfare (UN Women, 2023). Thus, addressing gender inequality is not only a matter of equity but also crucial for sustainable development and democratic consolidation.

This study, therefore, seeks to examine women's representation in government and non-governmental sectors in Taraba State and Women's Participation in Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Other Political Activities in Taraba State.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

2.1 Concept of Gender Inequality

Gender inequality refers to the unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based solely on their gender. It manifests in various social, economic, political, and cultural dimensions, often privileging

men while marginalizing women and other gender minorities. One of the core mechanisms through which gender inequality operates is sexism. According to Margaret M., sexism is a form of discrimination where individuals are subjected to prejudicial treatment purely based on gender differences. She asserts that sexism frames men and women within two dimensions of social cognition: benevolent sexism and hostile sexism.

Benevolent sexism occurs when women are viewed as possessing a low degree of competence but a high degree of warmth, reinforcing stereotypical roles of care, nurturance, and passivity (Macionis & Plummer, 2015). Although seemingly positive, this perception limits women to roles aligned with traditional gender expectations, excluding those who deviate from such stereotypes. Consequently, it perpetuates systemic inequality by reinforcing the notion that women are dependent and in need of male protection (Anifowose & Enemuo, 2008).

On the other hand, hostile sexism portrays women as competent but lacking warmth. It manifests through antagonistic attitudes toward women who are perceived as challenging male dominance—whether through feminist ideologies or assertive behaviors (Schaefer, 2017). In economic and professional contexts, such discrimination is evident in preferential treatment and networking practices. Men, who predominantly hold influential positions in many sectors, often favor other men for career advancement due to shared traits, further marginalizing women (Fulcher & Scott, 2017).

Kurts, cited in Ebere (2013), defines gender as a complex social relationship between males and females within society, marked by power differentials and economic disparities. He emphasizes that gender inequality is a form of discrimination that manifests in the underrepresentation of women in developmental decision-making processes and leadership roles. Similarly, Bukoye (2017) contends that gender discrimination involves any exclusion or distinction based on sex, which nullifies the recognition and participation of women, irrespective of their marital status.

Coleman (2017) observes that despite significant strides in advancing gender equality, gender-based discrimination remains pervasive globally. He highlights that in no region of the developing world do women enjoy equal legal, social, and economic rights as men. Gender gaps in access to resources, economic opportunities, political participation, and decision-making authority are widespread, undermining sustainable development. Consequently, intelligent and resourceful women are often relegated to the background due to entrenched cultural norms and traditions.

Furthermore, gender roles socially constructed expectations about the appropriate behavior, activities, and responsibilities of males and females reinforce gender inequality (Macionis & Plummer, 2015). Schaefer (2017) notes that masculinity is often associated with toughness, while femininity is linked to tenderness, thereby prescribing rigid behavioral norms. Fulcher and Scott (2017) emphasize that gender is not merely an inherent characteristic but a social performance, continually enacted through interaction with others.

In the context of this study, the term “women gender” refers to the social, cultural, and behavioral expectations associated with being female. It acknowledges that gender, distinct from biological sex, is shaped by societal norms, cultural traditions, and learned behaviors influenced by the environment in which individuals are raised.

Concept of Politics

Politics is a multifaceted and contested concept, with varying definitions shaped by scholars across different eras. Originating from the Greek term *Polis*, which referred to the city-state, politics was traditionally seen as encompassing all societal and state activities without distinguishing between personal and public life (Johari, 2011). Classical philosophers like Aristotle famously described man as a “political animal,” suggesting that human beings naturally engage in political interactions to define their positions in society, struggle for scarce resources, and resolve conflicts (Anifowose & Enemuo, 2008). In modern times, scholars such as Lasswell (1930) and Dahl (1995) have

conceptualized politics in terms of power, authority, and influence, with Lasswell defining politics as “the study of shaping and sharing political power,” and Dahl emphasizing persistent patterns of human relationships involving rule and authority.

Further contributions by thinkers like Easton (1967) and Bluhm (1965) expanded the definition of politics beyond formal institutions, focusing instead on the behavioral aspect of political activities. Easton (1967) notably described politics as the “authoritative allocation of values for a society,” highlighting that politics is fundamentally about decision-making, conflict resolution, and value distribution within a community. Bluhm (1965) reinforces this view by defining politics as a social process involving rivalry and cooperation in the exercise of power, applicable in various contexts beyond governmental institutions. This study, therefore, adopts politics as the interplay of power-seeking relationships among actors, structured within the frameworks of political parties, state institutions, and the broader societal context (Anifowose & Enemuo, 2008).

Concept of Political Participation

Women participation is the involvement of the women in the political system. Eakin cited in Adelekan (2010) described women participation as the process through which the women plays a role in the political life of their society and has the opportunity to take part in deciding what common goals of the society are and the best way of achieving these goals. According to Akamare (2003) women participation is an aspect of women political behaviour and it focuses on the way in which women take part in politics. It is a voluntary activity and one may participate directly or indirectly. The various ways by which the women can be involved in the political system include selection or election of political leaders, formulation of policies, community activities and other civic engagements.

According to Awolowo and Aluko (2010), the essence of women participation in any society, either civilized or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and to influence decision making. Women participation is a means of contributing ones quota to the political system and

overall development of the nation. Women participation is one of the fundamental requirements of democratic governance.

Adelekan (2010) emphasized that ideally, democracy means individual participation in the decisions that involves one's life. In a democratic system, there is the necessity for the citizenry (both men and women) to be fully involved in the democratic procedures of the choice of rulers and effective communication of the public policies and attitudes. Any claim to democratic regime or state must essentially embrace a high degree of competitive choice, openness, and enjoyment of civic and political liberties and political participation that involves all groups of the society (Arowolo and Aluko, 2010).

The extents to which women participate in the political system differ from person to person. Falade (2008) identified six types of women political participants. These are:

- i. The inactive: These are the women that take no part in any political activity
- ii. Voting specialists: These are the women that get eagerly engaged only in voting. Besides voting, they are not concerned about other political activities.
- iii. Parochial participants: These women participate in politics occasionally. They vote or get involved in any other political activity only when it affects their personal interest.
- iv. The communalist: These are those who get engaged in voting regularly, they also get involved in community affairs but they are not involved in political campaign activities
- v. The campaigners: They are actively involved in political campaign but inactive in other community affairs.
- vi. Complete activists: They are highly involved in all political activities. They actively participate in voting, political campaign, community activities and make contact with public officials.

Some of the factors that determine political participation are: cultural, economic, political, religious and educational backgrounds of individuals.

Also, the level of political awareness as well as the measure of confidence in the political process determines the extent to which the citizens participate in the political system. In Nigeria, politics is influenced by money, ethnic and religious factors. Since independence in 1960, religious and ethnic politics characterize electioneering process in Nigeria. This is the reason why Albert Legogie, former deputy Senate President, pointed out that it was clear from the trend of the election that there was a big gulf, a dichotomy between the north and the south and between Christians and Muslims (Adeyemo, 2011).

For instance, during the post-presidential election violence in the Muslim dominated northern part of Nigeria, southerners and Christians were attacked and killed while many churches were burnt. Falade, (2007) expressed that politics in Nigeria is regarded as a dirty game and it is practiced with bitterness, hatred, rancor and other associated evils. The outcome of this is that Nigeria is in vicious cycle of political crises and instability. Deceit and unfulfilled promises by political leaders discouraged a number of Nigerians from participating in election and other political activities.

Falade (2008) argued that politicians make series of promises during election campaign. Most of these promises are not fulfilled after they had been voted in to power. As a result of this, some voters lose interest in election. One of the respondents interviewed during the 2011 election expressed that "I have come to the sun to suffer even though I am not benefiting anything from the government...I don't even have confidence in them because they have been failing us generally" (Adelakun, 2011).

There is low level of women participation among the Nigerian citizens. Many Nigerians are indifferent in political matters. The INEC noted that Nigerians' participation during the last general election in the 2011 was low. Only 35% of the 70 million registered voters took part in the election. The Friedrich Elbert Stifting Foundation conducted a research on the 2011 election and identified lack of transparent elections, election violence and politicians' noncommittal to

their campaign promises as major reasons for voters' apathy in the country (Odebode, 2011).

The political apathy in Nigeria is based on the twin problems of ignorance and deliberate deception by some politicians. The consequence of this is the inability of the masses to have a link between their state of underdevelopment and their non-participation in the electoral process (Fabiya, 2010). In the light of this Falade (2007) concluded that the Nigerian political culture has not given room for the entrenchment and sustenance of true democracy. Awolowo and Aluko (2010) expressed that the low level of political participation of the Nigerian women is becoming alarming and disturbing. Since the emergence of political independence in 1960, the Nigerian women have remained invisible in the political process.

The 1985 Beijing declaration to which Nigeria is a signatory provides that 30% of all positions in government should be given to women. This policy is yet to be implemented in Nigeria because there is a continuing trend of male domination of political and other public positions (Oloyede, 2004; Adelekan, 2010). The marginal involvement of African women in the political process results from the lingering inhibitive cultural and patriarchal forces against women's engagement in politics that characterized African traditional societies (Chuku, 2009).

Political participation in this study refers to the involvement of individuals in the processes and activities related to politics and governance. It encompasses a wide range of actions through which people contribute to the functioning of their political system and the decision-making processes of their governments.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

National and state-specific studies provide significant insights into gender inequality and women's political participation. Arowolo and Aluko (2010) argue that patriarchal structures, political violence, and high campaign costs significantly hinder women's political participation in Nigeria. Similarly, Agbalajobi (2010) emphasizes the role of education

and economic empowerment, noting that systemic barriers disproportionately affect women's access to leadership positions. Okeke-Ihejirika and Franceschet (2002) examine legislative reforms and conclude that societal attitudes must change for such reforms to be effective.

Studies by Nwankwo (2020) and Ibrahim and Salihu (2004) explore the roles of NGOs and discriminatory practices, respectively, in marginalizing women. They highlight the need for legal frameworks and advocacy efforts to address systemic gender disparities. Fatile and Adejuwon (2012) further examine policy gaps, revealing that while gender equality initiatives exist, implementation remains weak, particularly in rural areas.

In Taraba State, Abdulraheem et al. (2021) document the influence of patriarchy on women's political participation, emphasizing the dominance of traditional norms that suppress women's involvement in governance. Ishaku (2018) identifies socio-economic barriers such as limited education and financial independence as significant constraints. Usman and Bako (2020) reveal that educated women are more likely to participate in politics but face community resistance.

Amali and Aluko (2017) discuss the role of local government structures, noting a lack of gender-sensitive policies. Danladi and Gambo (2019) highlight women's exclusion from traditional leadership roles, which perpetuates broader political marginalization. Zubairu (2022) evaluates international aid programs aimed at promoting gender equity in Taraba State, concluding that their impact is limited by inadequate funding and cultural resistance.

Key themes from these studies include the pervasive impact of patriarchy, the importance of education and economic empowerment, and the critical role of policy implementation. National and state-specific findings collectively underscore the urgent need for coordinated efforts to address systemic barriers and promote gender-inclusive governance.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Classic Democratic theory as its theoretical framework. Classic Democratic theory was developed by Dye and Zaiyler in (1972). This theory sought to determine the best way to create equality among citizens, gender parity and good governance. Dye and Zaiyler's idea of democracy is popular participation, where the people must be involved in the process of policy-making. To them, democracy is all about a representative system. In a representative system, only those that do not satisfy certain legal requirements are prevented from voting or being voted for. This is contained in their book "Irony of Democracy". Classic Democratic theory is concerned with political will or commitment of all citizens irrespective of gender, which is linked to its vision of transforming the society. The political will is further stimulated by an enabling environment geared towards greater commitment to gender equality (Mba, 2005:10).

If a woman is involved in politics, allowed a voice in decision making, and the government could substantively prove that they give her equal opportunity with men, such a woman has no much reason not to fully participate. In other words, equality should be the propeller to full political participation of the woman. In our literature review, we saw democracy as institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the peoples' votes. If this could hold sway, then we cannot satisfactorily explain and/or analyze women and democratic governance without recourse to Classic Democratic theory, which "its overriding concern was to improve popular participation and adequate representation" (Dahl, 1956).

Classic Democratic theory arose in part from the need for popular citizens' participation in decision making process. In Nigeria and especially in Northern zone of Taraba State, women were not adequately represented in politics/electoral process. The only way to expand women's political participation in electoral process is to give them adequate and equal representation in democratic process through free and fair periodic election and to

realize this objective, every citizen should be given the right to vote and be voted for.

The assumptions of the Theory

1. Popular participation in the decision that shapes the lives of individual society. The concept of popular participation means that the people must be involved in the process of policy-making. Only those that do not satisfy the legal requirements are prevented from voting.
2. Government by majority rule with recognition of the rights of minorities to try to become majorities. These rights include the freedoms of speech, press, assembly and petition and the freedom to descent, to form opposition parties and run for public office.
3. A commitment to individual dignity and the preservation of the liberal values of life, liberty and prosperity.
4. Commitment to equal opportunity for all men to develop their individual capacities. The objective of equality is not merely the recognition of certain dignity of human beings as such, but it is to provide him with the opportunity – equal to that guaranteed to others – for protecting and advancing his interest and developing his powers and personality.

Classic Democracy according to Dye and Zaiyler involves a democracy built upon political participation, the forms of which may vary from voting in general elections, to citizens' active participation in referendums and initiatives or through other tools of citizen participation. It involves a complete mental and social revolution on the part of women towards themselves, their fellow women, the society and the government, and on the part of government and political parties towards women and their problems (issues). Thus, "mental and social revolution" (or new outlook) requires the realization on the part of both parties (women and government or policy makers) that their mutual interest is not contradictory and both can prosper only through acceptance, not discrimination. This is the essence of Classic Democracy.

According to Dye and Zaiyler, the principle object of democracy should be to secure maximum efficiency for the government, coupled with maximum involvement of each citizen. The involvement of the citizens bestows accountability on the system and this will eventually lead to good governance on the part of those elected to represent the people's interest (Ifok, 2007:5).

Relevant of Classic Democratic Theory to this Study
Classic Democratic theory originated the principle of equality, popular participation and accountability that waves the magic wand in modern democracy. Classic Democratic theory is of the view that every citizen should be empowered politically by training (sensitizing) them for political and public life. After being trained and empowered in this direction, one becomes equipped and has confidence in oneself and would be interested to get involved. This will be clearer to us if we recall Azikiwe (1997)'s word that citizens can, if given the opportunity, participate more in politics if they are given the ability to participate in policy making. Of course, politicians believed as it was practical, that Classic Democracy enhances good governance and popular participation, but why they are against it is because they feared that granting women equal political opportunity with men would amount to full participation of women in public life and reduce men's dominance. This speaks volume of the under-representation of women in democratic governance and partisan politics in Northern zone of Taraba State, which this theory can provide for. The classic Democratic theory explains conservatism in politics in Northern zone of Taraba State. Even today, status quo has not given way to dynamism in politics in Enugu state. It is widely acknowledged that popular or citizen's participation ends with voting people into office. Little wonder the under-representation of women in public life especially in elective positions. Dye and Zaiyler's commitment to equality also points to government and politicians (men) that they have their own work to do and they also need to be sensitized to remove in their heart the negative perception of political women. These points, which ran across the discourse that both men and women should be sensitized and enlightened and be given equal opportunities to run for public office for effective democracy and good

governance. The emphasis on government by majority rule, freedom of speech, commitment to individual dignity for promoting and developing his power and personality aligns perfectly with our resolve that efficient democracy or democratic governance has to be people oriented to reduce alienation of citizens from their government.

For a woman particularly in Northern zone of Taraba State to be politically equal with a man, therefore, she should be prepared to rise above patriarchy and not accepting stereotype role that a woman's place is in the kitchen or that a woman is no match to a man in the political arena. It is even held by this theory that when the government is by majority rule, recognition should be given to the rights of minorities to try to become majorities. With commitment to popular participation and equal opportunity for all men to develop their individual capacities, which this theory is not laconic about, women should be at their best politically. There is no efficient democracy if citizens cannot participate in governance beyond voting.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative research where the research process focused on discussions and analysis. As such, data analysis in this research were organized categorically and chronologically. Therefore, the major sources of data were obtained through a literature survey of books, journals, and reports of dailies amongst others. These data were qualitatively analysed and interpreted to attain the objective of the study.

Women's Representation in Government and Non-Governmental Sectors in Taraba State

Examining women's representation across various sectors in Taraba State reveals a significant gender disparity, reflecting broader national trends in Nigeria.

Historically, Taraba State has had limited female representation in executive positions. Notably, Aisha Jummai Alhassan, popularly known as "Mama Taraba," served as the state's Attorney General and Commissioner of Justice. She was also appointed as the Minister of Women Affairs in 2015 (Wikipedia,

2024). Despite her prominence, such high-level appointments for women remain rare in the state.

An examination of women's representation in government and non-governmental sectors in Taraba State reveals persistent gender disparities, despite isolated progress. Historically, women's presence in executive positions within the state has been minimal. Apart from the notable exception of Aisha Jummai Alhassan, popularly known as "Mama Taraba," who served as Attorney General and Commissioner of Justice, and later as Minister of Women Affairs, female appointments to such high-ranking roles remain rare. According to data from the Taraba State Ministry of Women Affairs (2022), less than 10% of commissioner positions in the state cabinet are held by women, reflecting systemic exclusion.

Governor Agbu Kefas of Taraba State has made notable strides in promoting gender inclusivity within his administration, particularly in the executive branch. In July 2023, he appointed a 21-member cabinet, with seven women holding commissionerhip. These appointments include Engr. Naomi Tanko Agbu as Commissioner for Energy and Economy Development, Dr. Sarah Enoch Adi for Finance, Budget, and Economic Planning, and Dr. Augustina Godwin for Education. Others include Mrs. Zainab Usman for Information and Re-orientation, Mrs. Mary Sinjen for Women Affairs and Child Development, Mrs. Aishat Abdul'aziz Barde for Environment and Climate Change, and Dr. Philister Ibrahim Musa for Social Justice and Re-integration (Daily Trust, 2023). This level of female representation in the state's executive council is a significant development, demonstrating the administration's commitment to gender inclusion.

Similarly, women's legislative representation has been poor; INEC records from the 2019 and 2023 elections indicate that no female candidate was elected to the National Assembly from Taraba State, and the State House of Assembly saw only one woman elected in 2019, and one in 2023. This is consistent with the national average, where women's representation in legislative positions hovers around 6% to 7% (NBS, 2023) while there is a slide increase

in the current administration where women constitute 33.33% going by their number which is 7 out of 21 cabinet members in Agbu Kefas current administration.

Judicial representation, though slightly better, still reflects male dominance, with Taraba State High Court records (2023) showing that out of 20 judges, only four are women, while the Nigerian Bar Association Jalingo Branch (2022) reports that women make up just 18% of practicing lawyers in the state.

The Nigerian Local Government Report (2023) reveals that only two women have held chairmanship positions across the 16 LGAs over the past decade and currently only Yororo has a Woman as Chairperson, and female councillorship representation remains below 15%. Interestingly, women fare slightly better in the non-governmental sector; ActionAid Nigeria (2022) notes that approximately 35% of NGOs and CSOs in Taraba State are led by women, particularly in areas such as healthcare, education, and advocacy. Nonetheless, leadership in larger economic and policy-oriented NGOs is still predominantly male. These patterns underscore that while individual women have broken barriers, overall representation across sectors in Taraba State remains limited, echoing broader gender imbalances seen at the national level.

Women's participation in Taraba State's legislative processes has been minimal. Aisha Alhassan broke new ground by becoming the first female senator representing Taraba North from 2011 to 2015 (Punch, 2023). However, subsequent female representation in both the National Assembly and the State House of Assembly has been limited and currently only member Bali one state constituency was able to produce female representative from the 16 LGAs, mirroring the national average, where women's representation has fluctuated between 6.6% and 7.2% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

Specific data on women's representation in Taraba State's judiciary is scarce. Nationally, women constituted approximately 31.87% of National Judicial Officers in 2016, with a slight decrease to

28.86% in 2018 (Punch, 2023). While women have held significant judicial positions, such as the President of the Court of Appeal, no woman has served as the Chief Justice of Nigeria.

At the local government level, women's representation in Taraba State has been low. A study focusing on Wukari Local Government Area highlighted that women's political participation is crucial for economic development, yet their involvement remains limited. The study advocates for increased support to enhance women's participation in local governance (Ajol, 2023).

Women's Participation in Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Other Political Activities in Taraba State.

Between 2015 and 2024, women's participation in political parties, interest groups, and grassroots political activities in Taraba State has remained constrained by socio-cultural and institutional barriers. Despite some progress, female political engagement is still largely symbolic, with men dominating decision-making processes in major political parties.

The People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC), the dominant political parties in Taraba State, have made efforts to include women in their structures. However, from 2015 to 2024, women have been largely assigned roles in women's wings or as party mobilizers rather than being positioned for leadership roles (Danbala & Okafor, 2024). For instance, while women have actively campaigned during elections, few have been given opportunities to contest for strategic positions. Female aspirants often face financial and structural disadvantages that prevent them from securing party nominations (Ette & Akpan-Obong, 2023).

Women have played significant roles in interest groups, advocacy movements, and political mobilization, especially in grassroots organizations like the Taraba Women Political Forum (TWPF). These groups have been instrumental in advocating for gender-inclusive policies and voter education programs (Deji, Yusuf, & Titus, 2019). In the wake of national and state-level elections, women's groups

in Taraba State have mobilized against gender discrimination in political appointments and electoral processes. However, their influence in decision-making structures within political parties remains marginal.

Barriers to Women's Political Participation (2015–2024)

Women's political participation between 2015 and 2024 has been significantly hindered by multiple barriers, with financial constraints being one of the most prominent. Many women lack the economic resources to fund their campaigns or influence party decision-making processes, limiting their ability to compete effectively in elections (Tama & Maiwuya, 2022). In addition to financial limitations, political violence and intimidation have further discouraged women's involvement in politics. Reports indicate that female politicians, particularly in Taraba State, have faced threats, harassment, and various forms of intimidation, creating an environment that discourages many from actively pursuing political careers (Ette & Akpan-Obong, 2023). Beyond financial and security challenges, patriarchal party structures have also played a significant role in limiting women's participation. Male-dominated political networks often exclude women from major decision-making roles, making it difficult for them to gain the necessary political support and visibility (Lamai, 2019). These structural barriers collectively contribute to the persistent underrepresentation of women in Nigeria's political landscape, despite ongoing advocacy for greater gender inclusivity.

Opportunities for Increased Women's Political Participation

Opportunities for increased women's political participation have emerged through various electoral and political reforms, particularly the implementation of affirmative action policies such as gender quotas. These measures have the potential to significantly enhance women's representation in governance by ensuring a minimum level of female participation in elective and appointive positions (Lamai, 2019). Another crucial avenue is economic empowerment programs, which focus on providing financial support and training for aspiring female politicians. By addressing the economic barriers that often hinder

women from contesting elections, these programs create a more level playing field and enhance women's ability to compete effectively in political spaces (Danbala & Okafor, 2024). Additionally, advocacy and public awareness campaigns play a vital role in challenging discriminatory norms and increasing women's political engagement. Strengthening gender-focused advocacy efforts can shift societal perceptions, encourage greater support for female candidates, and create a more inclusive political landscape (Danbala & Okafor, 2024). These combined strategies offer promising pathways to overcoming structural and cultural barriers that have historically limited women's political participation.

V. DISCUSSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS

Women's Representation in Government and Non-Governmental Sectors in Taraba State: The study reveals that women's representation across various sectors in Taraba State remains significantly low, echoing national patterns of gender disparity. Although there have been isolated cases of female leadership such as Aisha Jummai Alhassan's appointment as Minister of Women Affairs and her earlier role as Attorney General these instances are the exception rather than the norm. Recent developments under Governor Agbu Kefas' administration show some improvement, with women occupying 7 out of 21 commissioner positions, representing 33.33% of the cabinet. However, this progress is not reflected in legislative bodies where, as of the 2019 and 2023 elections, no woman from Taraba was elected to the National Assembly, and only one woman was elected to the State House of Assembly in each of those years.

Judicial representation is similarly low, with only four women out of twenty judges on the Taraba State High Court bench, and just 18% of lawyers in the Jalingo Bar being women. At the local government level, the number of female chairpersons across the 16 LGAs remains extremely limited, with only one woman currently holding such a position. Councillorship positions held by women are also below 15%. However, in the non-governmental sector, women lead approximately 35% of NGOs, particularly in areas like health, education, and

advocacy, although leadership in high-impact policy-driven NGOs remains male-dominated. These patterns indicate that despite some pockets of progress, gender inequality in representation across sectors persists in Taraba State.

Barriers to Women's Political Participation (2015–2024): Between 2015 and 2024, women's political participation in Taraba State has been significantly hindered by several structural and socio-cultural barriers. Financial constraints are among the most prominent challenges, as many women lack the resources to fund election campaigns or influence party decision-making processes. Political violence and the threat of harassment further discourage women from active participation, as they often face intimidation and hostility in political spaces. Additionally, political party structures are largely patriarchal and exclusionary. Women are frequently relegated to peripheral roles, such as serving in the women's wing or acting as mobilizers, without access to influential leadership positions or nomination for elective offices.

The dominance of male political networks has also marginalized women from key decision-making spaces, thus reducing their visibility and influence in political discourse. Despite these challenges, the study notes several emerging opportunities to enhance women's political participation. These include the adoption of affirmative action policies, such as gender quotas, which can institutionalize female inclusion in both elective and appointive offices. Economic empowerment initiatives, particularly those aimed at financing women's political ambitions and providing leadership training, are also crucial. Furthermore, public awareness and advocacy campaigns can help challenge societal norms and reshape attitudes toward women in leadership. Taken together, these strategies offer practical pathways to dismantling the barriers to women's political participation and fostering a more inclusive democratic process in Taraba State.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has looked at women's political involvement in Taraba State in relation to the

ongoing gender disparity. The findings show that despite national and international efforts to promote gender parity, structural, socio-cultural, and institutional hurdles continue to prevent women from actively participating in political processes. Patriarchal norms, financial restrictions, political violence, and discriminatory party structures were recognised as significant barriers to women's presence in political leadership at both the state and municipal levels.

Although NGOs, civil society, and international organisations have made some headway in pushing for women's empowerment, their effect is limited owing to ingrained cultural norms and a lack of institutional backing. The study emphasises the crucial relevance of include women's voices in political decision-making processes in Taraba State to promote inclusive governance and sustainable development.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implementation of Gender Quotas and Affirmative Action Policies: The Taraba State Government and political parties should institutionalize affirmative action policies that reserve a specific percentage of elective and appointive positions for women. This will help break systemic barriers and ensure increased female participation in governance.
2. Economic and Capacity Empowerment Programs for Women: Stakeholders, including NGOs, political institutions, and international agencies, should establish well-funded programs aimed at providing financial support, leadership training, and mentorship opportunities for women aspiring to political leadership. Empowering women economically will reduce their dependence and enable them to compete effectively within the political space.

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