

Women Prospects and Challenges in the Nigerian Politics: A Study of Yola North Local Government

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Abstract

This paper examines the participation of women in politics in Adamawa State, Nigeria, highlighting the challenges and opportunities that shape their political engagement. Despite constituting a significant proportion of the population, women remain underrepresented in political offices and decision-making positions. The study identifies cultural and social barriers, limited education and economic empowerment, political party dynamics, and violence and intimidation as major obstacles to women's political participation. However, constitutional provisions, gender activism, political will, and international support offer opportunities for increasing women's political representation and empowerment. A descriptive survey research methodology was adopted for this study. This approach primarily uses a questionnaire as the instrument for the data collection in the study. However, the study adopts interviews for more detailed information on the phenomenon. The population of the study include women primary in politics, People Democratic Party (PDP) and Progressive Congress (APC) party officials, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) staff at the INEC headquarters in Yola North, and the number of electorates. Moreover, the study adopted the probability sample technique for data collection, and it used the following formula: $[\epsilon = (\frac{pe}{t})]$ to find out the number of samples required for the study and the sample size was 284 respondents: The paper recommends gender-sensitive policies, political party reforms, voter education, and economic empowerment to address the challenges and harness the opportunities. By promoting women's political participation, Adamawa State can enhance democratic governance, development, and gender equality.

Keywords: Women's political participation, Adamawa State, gender, politics,

Introduction

In democratic societies, women have been a great source of support for electing political leaders due to their numbers and active participation in voting. In July 2022, The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reported that 4,339,006 women and men and 4,292,690 completed their voter registration in Nigeria, with women making up a slight majority. Nevertheless, they occupy less than 10% of political positions in Nigeria. Hence, gender inequality pervades every level of Nigerian society, including the political sphere. Lorber, J. (2018) asserted that this gender-stratified society assigns rights and responsibilities because of physiological differences between men and women. One must note that women's full and equitable participation in public life is essential to building and sustaining strong, vibrant democracies. In addition, women's participation in politics helps advance gender

equality and affects both the range of policy issues that get considered and the proposed solutions (Dekker 2013).

Theoretical Framework

This study employs both Cultural Relativism and Gender and Development (GAD) theory to analyse the socio-economic and cultural effects of women's participation in politics in Adamawa State. The approaches help perception of the challenges and opportunities that women politicians face as the result of cultural expectations including gender inequalities primarily in Yola North, Adamawa State, Nigeria. Cultural Relativism theory offers insight into the specific cultural perspective influencing women's roles. However, GAD theory enables a critical examination of structural barriers and potential pathways for empowerment within these constraints. By combining these approaches, this study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how local socio-cultural factors influences the socio-economic outcomes of women's political engagement.

Cultural Relativism is a concept in anthropology developed by Franz Boas and later expanded by Melville Herskovits (1948). The theory posits that each culture must be understood in terms of its own beliefs and values rather than judged against external standards. This perspective is particularly relevant to Adamawa State, where cultural norms and religious traditions have a profound influence on women's roles and shape the extent of their public participation especially in politics. The application of Cultural Relativism allows for an exploration of how these local cultural frameworks impact women's political involvement, which is often seen as diverging from traditional roles assigned to women as caregivers and homemakers (Miller, 2004). This perspective is crucial in framing how women's socio-economic progress through political participation intersects with local cultural values, both shaping and challenging them.

Furthermore, Cultural Relativism highlights the internal tensions women may face within Adamawa's political landscape, where traditional beliefs may resist the idea of women holding political office or influencing public policy. Such cultural resistance can affect both the extent and the form of women's engagement in politics. For instance, women may have to navigate cultural expectations by balancing their political roles with domestic responsibilities or by framing their political involvement in culturally acceptable terms. This framework allows researchers to examine how cultural norms not only restrict but also offer pathways for women to participate in politics, creating a complex interplay between socio-economic advancement and cultural adaptation (Miller, 2004). By focusing on these cultural dimensions, the study seeks to understand how cultural relativism shapes women's agency within politically restrictive environments.

Gender and Development (GAD), on the other hand, emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a critical response to the limitations of the Women in Development (WID) approach, which focused on integrating women into development initiatives without addressing the underlying structural inequalities they faced (Rathgeber, 1990). GAD centres on transforming gender relations by addressing systemic factors that limit women's access to resources and opportunities (Moser, 1993). In Adamawa State, where traditional gender roles delineate separate expectations for men and women, GAD provides a framework for analysing how women's entry into politics can disrupt these power structures and advance their socio-economic status. The theory underscores how political engagement can enable women to

challenge dependency and gain agency, which are often limited by their domestically defined roles (Kabeer, 2005).

Moreover, GAD theory takes an intersectional approach, recognizing that gender inequalities are compounded by factors such as class, education, and religion, all of which shape women's experiences in Adamawa's political sphere (Rathgeber, 1990). For example, religious norms in the region may intersect with gender expectations to further restrict women's roles in public life, impacting their socio-economic mobility. GAD's holistic lens makes it possible to analyze not only how political participation may benefit women economically but also how it can shift their social positioning and influence within the community. Thus, by applying GAD theory, this study explores the potential for women's political involvement to reshape both economic structures and cultural expectations, contributing to an evolving understanding of gender roles in Adamawa State.

Literature Review

Concept of Politics

Different scholars have propounded various definitions of the concept of politics. H Lasswell (2013) conceives politics as "Who gets What, When and How?" Politics from the sense of people are in power at a particular moment or those who can influence incumbents to determine how the power and resources of the State are appropriated. In addition, Kousolas limits the scope of politics to the State and its institutions by explaining it as "those activities that are closely related to the State and its structure of government (Kerr 2023). On the other hand, David E (1965) cited by Mauk, M. (2024), views the issue from the resource and value allocation perspective by defining politics as the authoritative allocation of values.

However, the word politics comes from the Greek word "*polis*", meaning the State or community as a whole. The concept of the "polis" was an ideal state and came from the writings of great political thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle (Filonik 2023). Hence, the word politics originally had connotations of how to create the ideal society. An ideal society is, in practice, a rather difficult and even impossible aim to achieve. In his writings "The Politics", Aristotle states, "Man is by nature a political animal". In other words, it lies deep within man's instinct (Mulgan, 1974). It is almost primal. Due to his nature, man should consider and realise his role within the "polis". So, according to Aristotle, "Politics is not a dreamt-up concept, but rather an inherent feature of mankind."

Concept of Political Participation

According to The Electoral Commission (2004), political participation is the activities of citizens that influence government and public policy processes. Verba, Nie and Kim (1978) define political participation as legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or their actions. This is in line with Brady (1995) by González Cacheda, B., & Cancela Outeda, C. (2024), who defines it as "an action by ordinary citizens directed towards influencing some political outcomes". Dunn (2007) states that it is an act that seeks to influence rules, laws or policies. Political participation is also identified with donating money to or raising funds for an organisation; voting in the election; signing a petition; and boycotting certain products or buying products for ethical, political or environmental reasons. It addition, it consists of contacting a public official or a politician, an organisation or the media; attending political

meetings, rallies or protests; and taking part in a strike or illegal protest (Kim, Hoewe (2023).

Brown (2014) categorises political participation into three: voting, traditional, and non-traditional forms. Voting is identified as a unique act of democracies. The traditional form, regarded as 'formal has the attributes of attending political meetings or rallies, working for candidates, contributing money to campaigns, and contacting government officials. Non-traditional forms, presented as unconventional, involve participation in activities such as signing petitions, protests, and boycotts. According to Munroe (2002), political participation is defined by the degree of exercise of citizens' rights to engage in political activities, through which citizens communicate their concerns and preferences to the government and pressure them to respond. Hence, political participation is a form of activity which is instrumental or expressive, voluntary or mobilised, legal or illegal, conventional or unconventional, with or without violence by an individual, man or woman, acting as a citizen (Nilges, 2005).

Research Methodology

A descriptive survey research methodology was adopted for this study. This approach primarily uses a questionnaire as the instrument for the data collection in the study. However, the study adopts interviews for more detailed information on the phenomenon. The population of the study include women in politics, People Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC) party officials, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) staff at the INEC headquarters in Yola North, and the number of electorates. Moreover, the study adopted the probability sample technique for data collection, and it used the following formula: $[\varepsilon = (\frac{pe}{t})]$ to find out the number of samples required for the study. Table 1 below shows the sample of the study:

Table 1: Population of the Study

Positions	Sample Size
Women Politicians	185
INEC Officials	25
Political Party Officials	47
Electorates	27
Total	284

Source: Flidwork 2025

Table 2: The difficulties women politicians face to emerge successful at the party primaries and general election in Yola North Local Government Area

Items	Yes	No	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Do you accept that the lack of money and financial support for women politicians remains a challenge for them when engaging in politics?	63%	27%	1.37	.484	.234
Is the women's failure in election related to a lack of unity and envy among women themselves	53%	47%	1.48	.502	.252

Do you attribute the women's failure in the election to bribery and rigging elections against the women candidates?	52%	48%	1.48	.502	.252
Do you accept that rejecting women politicians is part of the cultural practice among people in the area?	67%	33%	1.3267	.47136	.222
Do you see religion plays a significant role in denying women the right to be elected to an executive political office?	61%	39%	1.3861	.48929	.239
Do you agree that the failure of women to participate and win the general election is related to men's superiority complex?	53%	47%	1.4653	.50129	.251

Source:Fieldwork,2025

Table 2 above portrays 63% of the respondents, with a deviation of 0.484 and 0.234, affirmed that lack of money and financial support to women politicians remains a challenge to their political engagement. Likewise, 53% of the participants positively responded that the women's failure in the election was related to a lack of unity and envy among women. Similarly, 52% of the respondents attribute the women's failure in the election to bribery and rigging elections against the women's candidacy. Moreover, 67% of the respondents accepted that rejecting women politicians is part of the cultural practice among people in the area. Equally, 61% of the participants believed that religion plays a significant role in denying women the right to be elected to an executive political office. Lastly, 53% of the participants affirmed that they agree that the failure of women to participate and win the general election is related to men's superiority complex.

Table 3: The Progress that women have achieved in their participation in the political positions in Yola North Local Government Area

Items	Yes	No	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Are women in your political party, not the major party leaders, apart from positions always reserved for women, such as women leaders?	51%	49%	1.4950	.50247	.252
Do women freely participate in party primary elections, among other positions in the party?	48%	52%	1.5149	.50227	.252
Do women emerge victorious in the primary elections in political seats such as chairman, governor, senate and number of house of representative?	47%	53%	1.5248	.50188	.252
Do the party rules and regulations promote women's participation in politics?	51%	49%	1.4851	.50227	.252

Source: 2025 Fieldwork

Table 3 above shows that 51% of the respondents agreed women in their political party are not the major party leaders apart from positions always reserved for women, such as women leaders. However, 52% of the respondents disagreed that women freely participate in party primary elections, among other positions in the party. Moreover, 53% of the respondents rejected the idea that women emerged victorious in the primary elections in political seats such as chairman, governor, senate, and the House of Representatives because of the male participants' denial. Finally, 51% of the respondents confirmed that the party rules and regulations promote women's participation in politics.

Table 4: The best way to improve the participation in politics in Yola North Local Government Area could be:

Items	Yes	No	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Women should be sensitised to vote for women politicians who would give them attention.	56%	44%	1.4356	.49831	.248
Good and exemplary leadership	72%	28%	1.2871	.45468	.207
Women should emphasise the constitutional and party laws that gave them rights and privileges in the parties.	57%	43%	1.4950	.50247	.252
Women should be more committed, determined and dedicated to contesting and winning elections	82%	18%	1.1881	.39276	.154
Women should be committed to fighting against money politics, corruption and bribery in politics	77%	23%	1.2376	.42775	.183

Source: 2025 Fieldwork

Table 4 above shows that 56% of the respondents positively responded that sensitisation of women to vote for women politicians would give them attention. Moreover, 72% of the respondents agreed that good and exemplary leadership would always support women's leadership. At the same time, 57% of the respondents believe that women should emphasise the constitutional and party laws that give those rights and privileges in the parties' leadership. In addition, 82% of the respondents accepted that women should be more committed, determined, and dedicated to contest and win elections, and 77% of the respondents vied that women politicians should be committed to fighting against money politics, corruption, and bribery in politics that stopped them from emerging leadership positions.

Factors Hindering Women's Political Participation

1. Cultural/Patriarchal factor

Nigeria is a country ruled and dominated by the male gender. Cultural factors have contributed to the low women's participation in politics, and some tribes and cultures to date still see no reason why women should take roles and responsibilities in society. The social status of women in the aspect of culture makes them responsible for just the biological reproduction of the family (Adebajo et al 2023). Cultural factors have undermined the abilities of women to participate in politics and have made them less ambitious. Cultural

factors are vital factors that have contributed to the low participation of women in politics. Some tribes and cultures to date still see no reason why women should take roles and responsibilities in society aside from household functions (John 2023).

2. Religious Factor

Similar to the cultural factor, Nigerians hold religion in high esteem. In Islam, for example, even though the male and female gender are equal before the law and accountable for their actions, it is not so when it comes to politics (Dekker 2013). Neither Christianity nor Islam accords the female gender's many roles in politics because religion plays important roles in Nigeria. It helps shape the beliefs and actions of the people. Having such beliefs, they viewed women's participation in politics as forbidden, and they had to avoid politics. So many have been influenced by their religious ideologies, they view women's participation in politics as a forbidden act, and they have to avoid politics (Okunade 2023).

3. Economic factor

Competing in elections requires huge financial competencies, and lack of economic resources and finances is one of the hindrances to women's political participation. Some Nigerian women seeking political positions have problems meeting the necessary financial obligations. These highlighted the differences between female and male candidates; women's unequal access to economic or financial resources restricts them from managing their political activities (UN Organization, 2007).

4. Political violence

Since its inception, Nigeria's politics and election campaigns have been characterised by one form of violence or another, which makes it difficult for female aspirants to withstand violence in politics. The series of political violence that has been perpetrated in order to accomplish political goals, such as the threat to life, forced disappearance like kidnapping, targeted assassinations, and torture, either psychological or physical, discourage female participation in politics (Adamu 2023). In Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgent group in the northeast, coupled with a series of communal crises and violence, banditry, and kidnapping, could be politically motivated. Referring to the SBM intelligence report that helps in monitoring socio-political and economic developments in Nigeria, about 626 people were killed during the 2018/2019 election in Nigeria (Ardanaz et al 2023).

5. Stigmatisation

With the background of politics in Nigeria and the activities around it, women aspirants who ventured into politics are sometimes the terms "promiscuous" and "immoral". Women face all forms of marginalisation, discrimination, and different challenges, criticism when it comes to politics, and that is why they have low representation and lesser numbers of women holding political and decision-making positions, and they have been treated unfairly in the aspects of politics of the society (Adamu 2023).

Discussion of the Findings

The study discovered that the difficulties women politicians face are problems for emerging successful party leaders and candidates in primaries and general elections in the Yola North Local Government Area. The reason for that included political parties do not preserve positions for women apart from that of women leaders, among others. Therefore, the women do not freely participate in the party's primary elections, such as chairman, governors, senate and the number of house of representatives because those positions are for only male politicians despite the majority of the respondents confirming that the party rules and regulations promote women's participation in politics.

On the issue of women's progress and their participation in the political positions in Yola North Local Government Area, the result shows that women in their political party are not the major party leaders; women freely participate in party primary elections, among other positions in the party. In addition, those women who emerged victorious in the primary elections in political seats such as chairman, governor, senate, and number of house of representatives are not fully supported. The result also discovered that the party rules and regulations that promote women's participation in politics are not well followed.

Lastly, on improving the participation in politics in Yola North Local Government Area, the study discovered that sensitisation of women to vote for women politicians is much desired. Secondly, women should continue to exhibit good and exemplary leadership. At the same time, women should emphasise the constitutional and party laws that gave those rights and privileges in the parties' leadership, and women politicians should be more committed, determined, and dedicated to contesting and winning elections. Lastly, women politicians should be committed to fighting against money politics, corruption, and bribery in politics that stop them from emerging leadership positions.

Conclusion

The study shows that women in Yola North play a significant role in politics, especially in voting for candidates in primaries and general elections. Moreover, women have attempted to be relevant and have a voice in the governance process in Yola North. The study also observed that the participation of women in politics is essential to building and sustaining democracy in Yola North. Based on these, among other things, the study concluded that women politicians have many challenges in Yola North emanating from social and cultural beliefs and political practices in the Local Government.

Recommendations

Therefore, the study recommended:

- i. Strengthen democratic institutions*: Improve independence, accountability, and effectiveness of institutions like the judiciary, electoral commission, and anti-corruption agencies.
- ii. Encourage civic engagement: Support voter education, grassroots mobilization, and civil society activism to increase women participation in politics.
- iii. Foster economic development: Diversify the economy, invest in infrastructure, and promote entrepreneurship to reduce poverty and inequality between men and women, which would encourage them to participate in politics.
- iv. Address security concerns: Strengthen security forces, improve intelligence gathering, and address root causes of conflicts like poverty and unemployment. Many women are scared by the insecurity in politics
- v. Build bridges across ethnic and religious divides: Encourage dialogue, reconciliation, and inclusive governance to reduce tensions and promote national unity. This would improve women as religion and culture were among the major obstacles to women participation.
- vi. Support education and healthcare: Invest in human capital development to improve living standards and reduce poverty.
- vii. Encourage youth leadership: Provide opportunities for young Nigerians to take on leadership roles and contribute to political and economic development.

- viii. Foster international cooperation: Collaborate with global partners to address common challenges of women in politics such as economic inequality and culture.
- ix. Support electoral reforms: Implement reforms to improve the electoral process, reduce rigging, and increase voter confidence.

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