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WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ILORIN METROPOL (2011–2023): AN ASSESSMENT OF STRUCTURAL BARRIERS AND DEMOCRATIC INCLUSION

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Abstract

This study investigates women's political participation in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria, from 2011 to 2023, with emphasis on the level of engagement, major constraints, and implications for inclusive governance. Despite global and national commitments to gender equality, women in Nigeria remain marginalized in political leadership and decision-making processes. The study adopted a mixed-methods descriptive survey design that combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine women's political involvement. Primary data were collected from 150 survey respondents and 15 key informants selected from political parties, civil society organizations, and community leadership structures. Data collection instruments included structured questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. Findings reveal that women actively participate in voting, campaign mobilization, voter education, and grassroots political activities. However, their participation remains largely symbolic, as women are mostly confined to supportive roles with limited influence in political decision-making and leadership positions. Major barriers identified include patriarchal norms, financial constraints, male-dominated party structures, political violence, educational disparities, and societal biases against female leadership. Anchored on Feminist Political Theory, the study highlights the systemic nature of women's exclusion and the need for institutional reforms. The study concludes that women's participation has not translated into substantial political representation or influence. It therefore recommends economic empowerment, gender-responsive political reforms, enforcement of affirmative action policies, and expanded civic education to promote inclusive governance.

Keywords: Democratic inclusion; Politics, Political participation; structural barriers, Women's political participation

Introduction

Political participation is a fundamental pillar of democratic governance because it provides citizens with the opportunity to influence leadership selection, public policy formulation, and governance outcomes. In democratic systems, participation is not only a civic right but also an important indicator of political development, inclusion, and accountability. Among the various

dimensions of political participation, women's political participation has attracted significant global attention due to persistent gender disparities in political representation and decision-making. Women constitute nearly half of the world's population; however, their representation in political leadership remains disproportionately low, especially in developing countries. International frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) emphasise the need for equal participation of women in political and public life, yet implementation remains uneven across many emerging democracies. In Africa, women's political participation is shaped by patriarchal structures, socio-cultural norms, religious beliefs, and economic inequalities that limit access to political power, even where gender quotas and affirmative action policies exist. In Nigeria, despite the return to democratic governance in 1999 and increased opportunities for political engagement, women remain underrepresented in elective and appointive positions such as governorships, senatorial seats, and legislative assemblies, with their involvement largely confined to supportive and mobilising roles. Between 2011 and 2023, this pattern has persisted, particularly in Ilorin Metropolis, where women actively participate in campaigns, voting, voter education, and grassroots mobilisation but remain constrained by socio-cultural expectations, financial limitations, exclusionary political party structures, political violence, and persistent gender stereotypes that portray politics as a male-dominated sphere. Despite this visible involvement, there is still a gap in understanding the extent of women's participation and the factors influencing it in the study area; therefore, this study seeks to examine the level of women's political participation in electoral processes and political party activities in Ilorin Metropolis as well as the socio-cultural, economic, and political factors affecting their participation. The study is guided by two key research questions: what is the level of women's participation in electoral processes and political party activities in Ilorin Metropolis, and what socio-cultural, economic, and political factors hinder women's political participation in the study area? The study is significant as it contributes to existing knowledge on gender and political participation in Nigeria and provides empirical evidence for scholars, policymakers, civil society organisations, and political actors to design interventions that enhance gender inclusion and democratic governance. The study is delimited to women's political participation in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, between 2011 and 2023, focusing

specifically on electoral participation, political party involvement, and the constraints affecting women's political engagement.

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarification

Politics

Politics refers to the process through which power is acquired, exercised, and distributed within a society. It involves decision-making processes, institutional arrangements, and interactions through which public resources and governance outcomes are determined. In democratic systems, politics provides the framework for participation, representation, and negotiation of competing interests among individuals and groups. It also extends beyond formal government structures to include informal activities such as civic engagement and advocacy aimed at influencing public decisions. As contemporary political scholarship explains, politics is fundamentally concerned with how authority and influence are organised and exercised in society (Heywood, 2022). In the Nigerian context, politics is highly competitive and characterised by elite dominance, patronage networks, and limited citizen influence, particularly among women (Akinwale, 2023). Within this study, politics provides the broader environment within which women's political participation is analysed, especially in relation to access to power and decision-making structures in Ilorin Metropolis.

Political Participation

Political participation is broadly understood as the voluntary activities through which citizens seek to influence political processes, public decision-making, and governance outcomes. Contemporary scholarship emphasises that participation extends beyond voting and party membership to include civic activism, protest, and mobilisation (van Deth, 2021; Theocharis, 2023). In Nigeria, political participation is shaped by socio-economic inequality and weak institutional trust, which limit equal engagement among citizens (Adeyemi & Bello, 2023). Feminist political studies further argue that participation is influenced by gendered power relations and structural inequality that determine who participates and how effectively they do so (Paxton, Hughes, & Barnes, 2023). Thus, political participation includes both formal and informal actions aimed at influencing political authority and public policy.

Women's Political Participation

Women's political participation refers to the involvement of women in formal and informal political processes aimed at influencing governance, policy, and power distribution. This includes voting, contesting elections, joining political parties, and participating in civic advocacy. Although women constitute nearly half of the population, their representation in political leadership remains low. In Nigeria, women are often active during elections but are underrepresented in decision-making positions (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2023). Studies also show that even where women participate actively in campaigns and mobilisation, their influence in leadership structures remains limited (Okeke & Nwankwo, 2024). In Northern Nigeria, cultural and religious norms further restrict women's political advancement (Musa & Abdullahi, 2023). These studies collectively suggest that women's participation in Nigeria is often visible but not transformative.

Structural Barriers

Structural barriers refer to systemic and institutional constraints embedded in political, economic, and socio-cultural systems that limit equitable participation in governance. These include formal political structures such as party nomination processes and electoral systems, as well as informal norms such as patriarchy and gender stereotypes (Balogun & Sanni, 2023). In Nigeria, political parties are often dominated by male elites who control candidate selection, thereby limiting women's access to leadership positions (Nwosu, 2024). Economic constraints also play a major role, as the high cost of elections excludes many women from political competition (Eze & Chukwu, 2023). In addition, political violence and intimidation discourage women from active participation in politics (Onyema & Ibrahim, 2023). These barriers operate together to restrict women's political advancement.

Democratic Inclusion

Democratic inclusion refers to the extent to which all groups in society have equal opportunities to participate meaningfully in political processes and influence governance outcomes. It goes beyond numerical representation to include substantive participation and decision-making influence. In Nigeria, despite women's involvement in electoral processes, their representation in governance remains low (UN Women Nigeria, 2024). Scholars argue that democracy cannot be considered inclusive without meaningful representation of women in political decision-making (Egbetokun & Akinola, 2023). However, inclusion should also be measured by the quality of

participation and influence, not just presence in office (Hassan, 2023). These perspectives highlight that democratic inclusion in Nigeria remains limited in relation to women's political empowerment.

Empirical Review

Women's Political Participation and Representation in Nigeria

Empirical studies in Nigeria show that women's political participation remains limited despite democratic expansion and gender equality advocacy. Okeke and Nwankwo (2023) found that women in South-East Nigeria actively participate in voting and campaigning but remain underrepresented in elective positions due to patriarchal norms and party structures. Similarly, Adebayo and Yusuf (2022) reported that in South-West Nigeria, women's participation is largely symbolic, as they are mainly used for mobilisation during elections but excluded from decision-making processes.

Structural and Socio-Cultural Barriers to Women's Political Participation

Structural barriers are widely documented in Nigerian literature. Musa and Bello (2023) identified patriarchy as a major constraint limiting women's political advancement. Eze and Chukwu (2023) emphasized economic limitations such as the high cost of elections, which reduces women's competitiveness in political contests. Balogun and Sanni (2023) noted that political parties are male-dominated and control candidate selection processes, thereby disadvantaging women. In addition, Onyema and Ibrahim (2023) highlighted political violence as a major deterrent discouraging women from active political participation.

Women's Political Awareness and Democratic Inclusion

In Northern Nigeria, Ibrahim and Abdullahi (2024) observed improvements in women's political awareness due to civic education initiatives. However, Danjuma (2023) argued that institutional barriers continue to limit real political empowerment, indicating that increased awareness does not automatically translate into political representation. On democratic inclusion, Egbetokun and Akinola (2023) argue that women's inclusion is essential for democratic development, while Okafor and Chima (2024) note that women in political office often have limited policy influence. Similarly, Hassan (2023) emphasizes that inclusion should be measured not only by representation but also by actual influence in decision-making processes.

Research Gap

Despite extensive literature on women's political participation in Nigeria, most studies focus on national or regional perspectives, with limited attention to local contexts such as Ilorin Metropolis where socio-political dynamics may differ. Furthermore, many studies do not clearly distinguish between electoral participation, party involvement, and substantive political influence, thereby limiting analytical depth. There is also a lack of integrated studies that simultaneously examine socio-cultural, economic, institutional, and security-related factors affecting women's political participation within a single framework. Most importantly, there is a scarcity of empirical research focusing specifically on the 2011–2023 period in Ilorin Metropolis. This study therefore fills these gaps by providing a localized, comprehensive, and updated analysis of women's political participation in the study area.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Feminist Political Theory, which explains political life through the lens of gender relations and power structures and argues that political institutions are not neutral but are shaped by patriarchy that privileges male dominance in decision-making and governance. The theory emerged from feminist scholarship, with early contributions from Simone de Beauvoir (1949), who argued that women have historically been constructed as “the other” in social and political life, while Carole Pateman (1988) in *The Sexual Contract* demonstrated that democratic systems are built on gendered arrangements that exclude women from full political citizenship. Further developments by Iris Marion Young (1990) and Martha Nussbaum (2000) emphasise justice, capability, and inclusive democracy, arguing that equality requires not only formal rights but also substantive access to political power, while Judith Squires (2007) highlights the need for institutional reform and gender mainstreaming to achieve meaningful inclusion. The central assumptions of the theory are that political institutions are gendered, that women experience systemic exclusion from political power, and that formal equality does not automatically translate into substantive equality, as patriarchy operates through both formal structures such as political parties and informal norms such as culture, religion, and social expectations. In the Nigerian context, the theory is highly relevant because political participation is shaped by patriarchal values, socio-cultural constraints, and male-dominated party structures, where women are often active in electoral mobilisation but remain underrepresented in elective and decision-making positions due to financial constraints, political violence, and cultural

stereotypes (Aina, 2012; Okafor & Fapohunda, 2023). Although Feminist Political Theory has been criticised for over generalising women's experiences, being Western-centric, and underestimating women's agency, it remains useful for explaining structural gender inequality in political participation. In conclusion, the theory provides a comprehensive framework for analysing women's political participation in Ilorin Metropolis by highlighting structural, cultural, and institutional barriers while also offering pathways for achieving gender-inclusive governance through reforms, empowerment, and affirmative action strategies.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is suitable for examining women's political participation and perceptions within their natural setting without manipulating variables. The study was conducted in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria, comprising Ilorin East, Ilorin West, and Ilorin South Local Government Areas. Ilorin Metropolis was selected because it serves as the political, administrative, and economic centre of Kwara State and provides a suitable environment for assessing women's participation in political processes. The population of the study consisted of approximately 1,200 respondents, including women residents, political office holders, political party executives, and community leaders across the three local government areas. A sample size of 200 respondents was selected to ensure adequate representation while remaining manageable for data collection and analysis, and the sample was proportionately distributed across Ilorin East (70 respondents), Ilorin West (80 respondents), and Ilorin South (50 respondents) based on population density and political activity levels. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across age, educational background, and level of political involvement, while simple random sampling was used within each stratum, and purposive sampling was used to select key informants such as political party executives and community leaders due to their specialised knowledge of political processes. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, with the questionnaire designed to capture demographic information, levels of political participation, and perceived barriers to women's participation. The research instruments were validated through face and content validation by experts in political science and research methodology to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. Reliability of the instrument was tested using the test-retest method and analysed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.78, which indicates acceptable internal consistency. Data

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were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, tables, and charts for quantitative data, while qualitative data from interviews were analysed using thematic content analysis involving coding, categorisation, and interpretation of emerging themes. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study, as respondents were informed about the purpose of the research, informed consent was obtained, confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and participation was voluntary with the option to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents the analysis of data collected through questionnaires, key informant interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs) in Ilorin Metropolis. The analysis is guided by the research questions and focuses on women's political participation, its constraints, perceptions, and possible improvement strategies. A total of 150 questionnaires were analysed, while qualitative data from KIIs and FGDs are used to support and enrich the findings.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 150)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	10	6.7%
	Female	140	93.3%
Age	18–29 years	25	16.7%
	30–39 years	45	30.0%
	40–49 years	62	41.3%
	50 years and above	18	12.0%
Marital Status	Single	23	15.3%
	Married	108	72.0%
	Divorced	11	7.3%
	Widowed	8	5.3%
Educational Qualification	Primary Education	15	10.0%
	Secondary Education	53	35.3%
	Tertiary Education	80	53.3%
	No Formal Education	2	1.3%

Occupation	Civil Servant	45	30.0%
	Trader	17	11.3%
	Student	13	8.7%
	Politician	52	34.7%
	Self-Employed	22	14.7%
	Other	1	0.7%
Religion	Islam	117	78.0%
	Christianity	25	16.7%
	Traditional Religion	4	2.7%
	Other	3	2.0%

The demographic data shows that the study is heavily female-dominated, with 93.3% of respondents being women and only 6.7% men, indicating that the findings largely reflect women's perspectives. The majority of respondents are within the 40–49 age group (41.3%), followed by those aged 30–39 years (30.0%), suggesting a mature and active population.

Most respondents are married (72.0%), which implies that many have family responsibilities that may shape their experiences and participation. In terms of education, over half (53.3%) have tertiary education, indicating a relatively high level of awareness and capacity to engage with socio-political issues.

Occupationally, politicians (34.7%) and civil servants (30.0%) form the largest groups, showing that a significant portion of respondents are directly involved in governance or public service. Finally, the sample is predominantly Muslim (78.0%), reflecting the religious composition of the study area.

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question One: What is the level of women's political participation in Ilorin Metropolis between 2011 and 2023?

Table 2: Women's Political Participation in Ilorin Metropolis during the Fourth Republic (N = 150)

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Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score*
Women actively participated in electoral processes (voting, campaigning, mobilization)	106 (70.7%)	38 (25.3%)	5 (3.3%)	1 (0.7%)	1.34
Women contested for elective political offices	28 (18.7%)	105 (70.0%)	14 (9.3%)	3 (2.0%)	1.95
Women were involved in political party structures and activities	30 (20.0%)	102 (68.0%)	14 (9.3%)	4 (2.7%)	1.95
Women occupied appointive or leadership positions	30 (20.0%)	99 (66.0%)	15 (10.0%)	6 (4.0%)	1.98
There has been improvement in women’s political participation	35 (23.3%)	97 (64.7%)	16 (10.7%)	2 (1.3%)	1.90

Figure 1: Women’s Political Participation in Ilorin Metropolis

*Scale: Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Disagree = 3, Strongly Disagree = 4

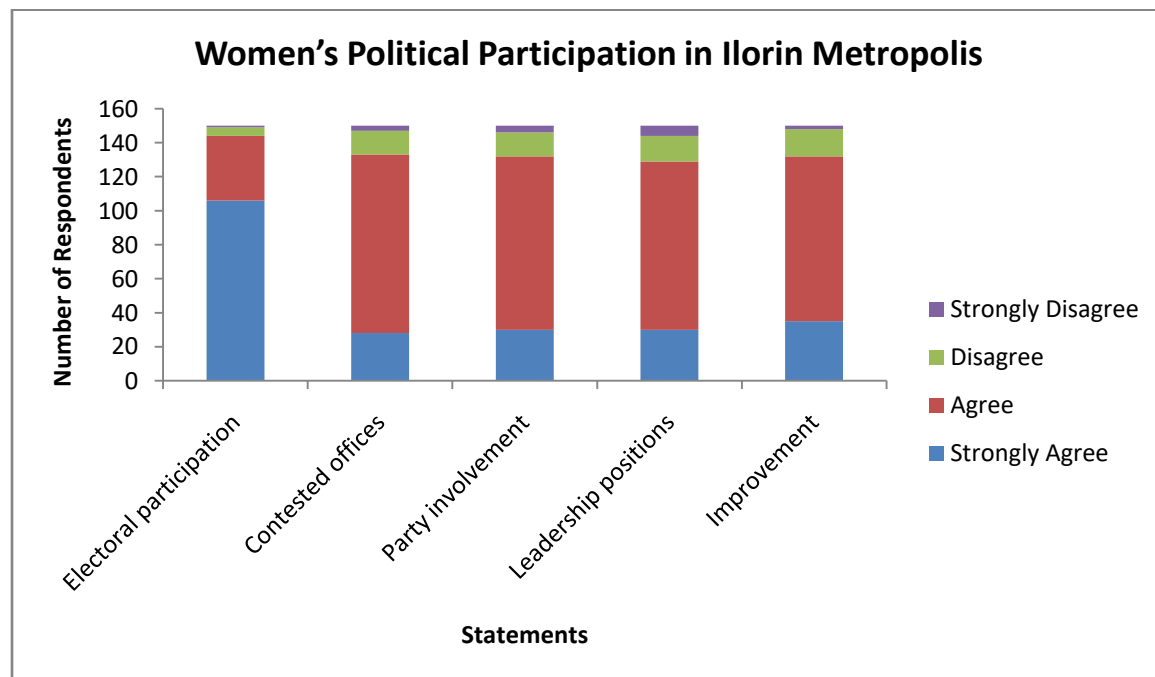


Figure 1: Women’s Political Participation in Ilorin Metropolis

The data shows that women’s political participation in Ilorin Metropolis is **visible but uneven across levels**. A large majority of respondents agree that women actively participate in electoral

processes such as voting, campaigning, and mobilization (mean = 1.34), indicating strong grassroots involvement.

However, participation declines when it comes to higher-level engagement. While most respondents agree that women contest elections, are involved in party structures, and occupy leadership positions, the mean scores (1.95–1.98) suggest that this involvement is moderate and not as strong as grassroots participation.

In addition, a majority of respondents agree that there has been some improvement in women's political participation (mean = 1.90), but this progress appears to be gradual rather than significant. Overall, the findings indicate that women are highly active at the grassroots level but less represented in leadership and decision-making positions.

Research Question Two: What factors limit women's political engagement?

Table 3: Factors Constraining Women's Political Participation in Ilorin Metropolis during the Fourth Republic (N = 150)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score*
Socio-cultural practices significantly constrain women's political participation	79 (52.7%)	58 (38.7%)	10 (6.7%)	3 (2.0%)	1.58
Religious norms and interpretations discourage women's political engagement	85 (56.7%)	54 (36.0%)	7 (4.7%)	4 (2.7%)	1.53
Inadequate access to financial resources limits women's political participation	82 (54.7%)	59 (39.3%)	1 (0.7%)	3 (2.0%)	1.43
Political violence and intimidation discourage women's participation	63 (42.0%)	73 (48.7%)	11 (7.3%)	3 (2.0%)	1.69
Male dominance within political parties marginalizes women in decision-making	85 (56.7%)	51 (34.0%)	7 (4.7%)	7 (4.7%)	1.57
Domestic and caregiving responsibilities reduce women's	46 (30.7%)	78 (52.0%)	19 (12.7%)	7 (4.7%)	1.91

political engagement					
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Figure 2: Factors Constraining Women’s Political Participation in Ilorin Metropolis

*Scale: Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Disagree = 3, Strongly Disagree = 4

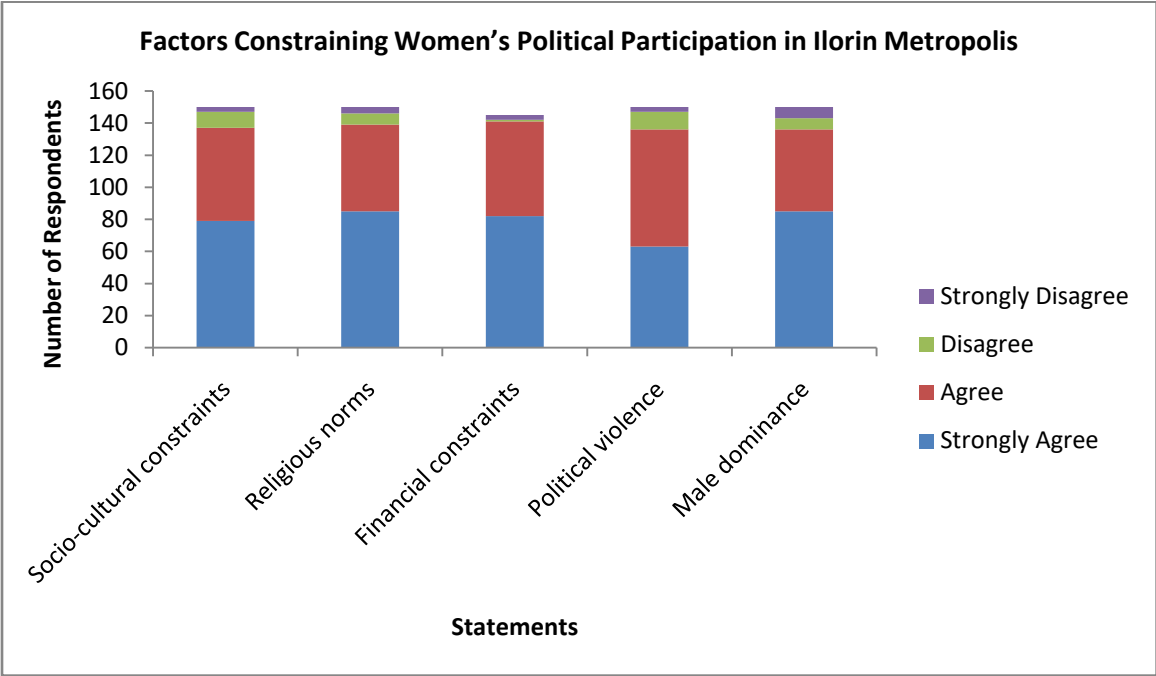


Figure 2: Factors Constraining Women’s Political Participation in Ilorin Metropolis

The findings indicate that women’s political participation in Ilorin Metropolis is significantly constrained by multiple interrelated factors. Socio-cultural practices and religious norms (mean = 1.58; 1.53) emerge as deeply entrenched barriers limiting women’s involvement. Financial limitation constitutes the most critical constraint (mean = 1.43), restricting access to resources necessary for effective participation.

Additionally, male dominance within political parties (mean = 1.57) reflects structural inequalities that hinder women’s influence in decision-making processes. Political violence and intimidation (mean = 1.69) further create an unfavourable environment for engagement, while domestic and caregiving responsibilities (mean = 1.91), though comparatively less pronounced, continue to impede women’s active participation.

Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data

Emerging Themes from Key Informant Interviews (KII)

Theme 1: High Participation but Low Political Power Multiple informants noted women’s strong grassroots participation but limited presence in leadership roles.

“Women are visible in politics but not in positions of power or decision-making.” – Political Participant, Ilorin West

Theme 2: Socio-Cultural and Religious Constraints Several participants identified socio-cultural and religious norms as key barriers to women’s political involvement.

“Leadership by women is sometimes seen as taboo.” – Journalist / Public Administrator, Ilorin East

Theme 3: Financial Exclusion as a Structural Barrier Financial limitation was widely emphasized as a major constraint on women’s political advancement.

“Politics is expensive; women lack sponsors and financial networks.” – Political Participant, Ilorin West

Theme 4: Weak Institutional and Party Support Systems Participants highlighted the limited role of political parties in supporting women’s inclusion.

“Party structures are not women-friendly; women are not taken seriously.” – Woman Leader, Ilorin West

Theme 5: Family and Social Support as a Determinant Support from family and society was identified as a key factor influencing women’s political participation.

“Support should begin at home, especially from husbands and family.” – INEC Officer, Ilorin West

Insights from Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Theme 1: Grassroots Participation with Limited Leadership Participants highlighted women’s active involvement at the grassroots level but limited representation in leadership roles.

“Women are actively present... but their participation is mostly at the grassroots level.”

Theme 2: Male Dominance in Politics Participants described politics as a male-dominated space that shapes women’s opportunities and acceptance.

“Politics in Ilorin is still largely seen as a male-dominated space.” – Senatorial Wonder Leader, Ilorin Souths

Theme 3: Financial and Structural Barriers Financial constraints and male-controlled party structures were identified as major obstacles to women’s participation.

“Politics is financially demanding... many women lack sponsors.” – FGD Participant, Ilorin West

Theme 4: Growing Awareness with Limited Impact Participants noted increasing interest

Among women, though this has yet to translate into leadership representation.

“More women are showing interest but this has not significantly translated into leadership representation.” – Woman Leader, Ilorin West

Theme 5: Support and Inclusion as Pathways for Change Participants emphasized the need for stronger support systems, awareness, and inclusive practices.

“There is a need for greater awareness, encouragement, and financial support.”

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study indicate that women in Ilorin Metropolis are actively involved in political processes, particularly at the grassroots level, but their participation becomes significantly constrained as political activities move toward formal leadership and decision-making structures. This pattern reflects a clear participation–representation gap, where numerical involvement does not translate into substantive political power. Women are visible in electoral mobilisation, voting, and campaign support activities, yet they remain largely absent from elective offices and strategic party leadership positions. This outcome is consistent with empirical studies in Nigeria, particularly Adebayo and Yusuf (2022), who observed that women in South-West Nigeria are often mobilised during elections but excluded from decision-making, and Okeke and Nwankwo (2023), who reported similar underrepresentation of women in elective offices in South-East Nigeria despite active participation in political activities. A key explanation for this imbalance lies in the persistence of structural and institutional barriers within the Nigerian political system. Political party structures in Ilorin Metropolis are male-dominated, with candidate selection processes heavily controlled by party elites who are predominantly men. This finding aligns with Balogun and Sanni (2023), who argue that Nigerian political parties function as gatekeeping institutions that systematically disadvantage women through informal networks and patronage systems. In addition, the high cost of nomination forms, campaign financing, and political mobilisation creates significant economic exclusion for women, many of whom have lower access to financial capital compared to their male counterparts, supporting the findings of Eze and Chukwu (2023), who identified economic constraints as a major determinant of women's low electoral competitiveness in Nigeria. Beyond institutional and economic constraints, socio-cultural and religious factors also play a significant role in shaping women's political participation in Ilorin Metropolis, where cultural expectations regarding gender roles

often position politics as a male domain while women are expected to prioritise domestic responsibilities, and religious interpretations in some communities further reinforce these gendered divisions, discouraging women from seeking leadership positions; these findings are consistent with Musa and Bello (2023), who identified patriarchy as a deeply embedded cultural system limiting women's political mobility, and Onyema and Ibrahim (2023), who highlighted the role of societal norms and political violence in discouraging women's active engagement in politics across Nigeria. Interestingly, while women's political awareness appears to be increasing due to civic education and democratic exposure, this awareness has not significantly translated into higher levels of representation or influence, as similarly observed by Ibrahim and Abdullahi (2024) in Northern Nigeria, where increased political awareness among women does not automatically lead to empowerment, particularly when institutional barriers remain unchanged, reinforcing Danjuma's (2023) argument that institutional exclusion remains a major obstacle to meaningful women's political empowerment in Nigeria. Comparative evidence from other African democracies such as Ghana and Kenya also shows similar patterns, where women's participation has improved numerically but remains constrained at leadership levels due to entrenched patriarchal norms and unequal access to resources, although the Nigerian context, particularly in Ilorin Metropolis, appears more deeply shaped by the intersection of cultural conservatism, religious interpretations, and party-based patronage systems, making the barriers more complex and multilayered. These findings are strongly explained by Gender Inequality Theory and Feminist Political Theory, which highlight how structural arrangements within political institutions systematically disadvantage women and how patriarchy and power relations sustain exclusion, confirming that political marginalisation in Ilorin Metropolis is structurally produced rather than incidental, and they further indicate that improving women's political participation requires more than encouraging electoral involvement but demands comprehensive reforms including political party restructuring, economic empowerment of women, enforcement of gender-inclusive policies, capacity-building initiatives, and sustained efforts to transform socio-cultural attitudes toward women's leadership.

Conclusion

This study examined women's political participation in Ilorin Metropolis between 2011 and 2023, with attention to patterns of involvement, structural constraints, and societal perceptions. It concludes that although women participate actively in political activities such as voting and

mobilisation, their involvement remains largely limited in terms of leadership and decision-making influence. The study further establishes that women's underrepresentation is driven by entrenched structural barriers, including patriarchal norms, economic constraints, institutional exclusion, political violence, and negative socio-cultural perceptions. Despite existing national and international gender equality frameworks, implementation gaps continue to hinder meaningful inclusion. The study therefore concludes that improving women's political participation requires not only increased involvement but also deliberate transformation of the political, institutional, and socio-cultural structures that sustain gender inequality.

Recommendation

1. Institutionalisation of Gender Quota System

The institutionalisation of a gender quota system is essential for improving women's political representation in Ilorin Metropolis. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), in collaboration with the National Assembly and political parties, should adopt a legally binding framework that guarantees at least 30–35% representation of women in both elective and appointive positions. This policy should not be treated as a voluntary guideline but as a mandatory requirement for political participation at party and national levels. Political parties such as APC and PDP should be compelled to integrate gender quota provisions into their constitutions, particularly in candidate selection and executive leadership structures. To ensure effective implementation, INEC should make compliance with gender quotas a prerequisite for party registration, candidate approval, and access to public electoral benefits. Furthermore, periodic gender compliance audits should be conducted, and results should be made publicly available to promote transparency and accountability. Sanctions such as disqualification from electoral funding or restrictions on party privileges should be applied to non-compliant parties in order to strengthen enforcement.

2. Political Party Internal Reform and Inclusion Mechanisms

Political parties in Nigeria require significant internal restructuring to become more inclusive and responsive to women's political participation. In Ilorin Metropolis, party structures remain heavily male-dominated, particularly in decision-making bodies such as ward, local government, and state executive committees. To address this imbalance, political parties should establish formal inclusion mechanisms that guarantee women meaningful participation beyond auxiliary roles. One effective approach is the creation of Women Inclusion Desks within party structures

at all levels to monitor and promote female participation in political activities. In addition, party constitutions should be amended to ensure that at least 30% of executive positions and delegate representation are reserved for women. Party primaries should also be reformed to enhance transparency and reduce elite manipulation, which often excludes female aspirants from competitive selection processes. These reforms will help institutionalise fairness and ensure that women are not only mobilised during elections but are also active participants in political decision-making.

3. Targeted Women's Political Capacity Development Programmes

There is a strong need for sustained capacity-building programmes aimed at strengthening women's political knowledge, leadership skills, and confidence. Government institutions such as the Ministry of Women Affairs, alongside civil society organisations and international development partners, should implement structured training programmes for women in Ilorin Metropolis. These programmes should focus on areas such as political leadership, campaign management, public speaking, negotiation skills, and electoral processes. In addition, mentorship schemes should be established to connect aspiring female politicians with experienced women in politics at the state and national levels, thereby providing guidance and role modelling. To further support participation, a dedicated Women Political Leadership Fund should be created to assist women with nomination fees, campaign logistics, and training expenses. These interventions will help bridge the gap between political awareness and actual participation by equipping women with the necessary skills and resources required to compete effectively in the political space.

4. Economic Empowerment for Political Inclusion

Economic constraints remain one of the most significant barriers to women's political participation, and addressing this challenge requires deliberate financial empowerment strategies. Government agencies, financial institutions, and development partners should collaborate to design targeted support programmes for women aspiring to political office. One key strategy is the establishment of soft loan schemes and grant programmes specifically for female political aspirants to reduce financial exclusion. Political parties should also consider reducing or waiving nomination fees for women in order to encourage greater participation in electoral contests. Furthermore, partnerships with microfinance institutions and donor organisations should be strengthened to provide low-interest loans and financial support packages for women engaged in

political activities. These measures will reduce the financial burden associated with political participation and create a more level playing field for women in politics.

5. Socio-Cultural and Media Reorientation Campaigns

Changing socio-cultural attitudes toward women in leadership positions is critical for achieving sustainable political inclusion. In Ilorin Metropolis, cultural norms and religious interpretations often reinforce the perception that politics is a male-dominated space. To address this, continuous public enlightenment campaigns should be implemented by the National Orientation Agency (NOA) in collaboration with media organisations, religious leaders, and traditional institutions. These campaigns should focus on promoting gender equality and reshaping public perceptions about women's leadership capabilities. Media platforms, including radio, television, and social media, should be actively engaged to highlight positive stories of women in politics and increase visibility of female political actors. Religious and traditional leaders should also be formally engaged as partners in advocacy efforts to ensure that messages of gender inclusion are widely accepted within communities. Over time, these interventions will help reduce cultural resistance and create a more supportive environment for women's political participation.

6. Security and Protection Framework for Women in Politics

Political violence remains a significant deterrent to women's participation in politics, and addressing this challenge requires strengthened security and protection mechanisms. Security agencies, particularly the Nigeria Police Force in Kwara State, should establish a specialised Women Political Safety Desk to address cases of harassment, intimidation, and violence against female political actors. This unit should be responsible for providing rapid response services during elections and political campaigns to ensure the safety of women candidates and their supporters. In addition, the legal system should enforce strict prosecution of individuals involved in political violence, particularly cases targeting women. Collaboration between security agencies, electoral bodies, and civil society organisations is also necessary to create early warning systems for election-related violence. These measures will help create a safer political environment that encourages greater participation of women in electoral processes.

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