

WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN BOKI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, CROSS RIVER STATE 1999-2023

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Abstract

This study examines women's political participation in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State from 1999 to 2023. Despite increased democratic opportunities, women remain underrepresented in political leadership. The study explores the level and nature of participation, identifies socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers, and assesses strategies for enhancing inclusion. Using Feminist Political Theory, the research reveals that women actively participate as voters and mobilizers but face significant challenges in attaining leadership positions due to patriarchy, financial constraints, and institutional discrimination. The study finds that while progress has been made in political awareness, a gap persists between participation and representation. Therefore, affirmative action, economic empowerment, educational advancement, and political reforms are strategic to improving women's political participation in Boki and should be highly intensified.

Keywords: *Women's political participation, Boki, Gender inequality, Political representation, Socio-cultural barriers*

Introduction

Women's political participation is widely recognized as a cornerstone of democratic governance, inclusiveness, and sustainable development. It ensures that governance structures reflect the diversity of society and that policies address the needs of all citizens. Globally, increased participation of women in politics has been linked to improved social welfare policies, enhanced

accountability, and more equitable development outcomes. However, despite these recognized benefits, women across many developing countries, including Nigeria, continue to face significant barriers to full political inclusion.

In Nigeria, women constitute nearly half of the population, yet their involvement in political processes remains disproportionately low. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, there have been sustained efforts at both national and international levels to promote gender equality in governance. Initiatives such as the National Gender Policy, as well as Nigeria's commitment to international frameworks like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, emphasize the need for increased female representation in political institutions. Nevertheless, these efforts have yielded limited results, particularly at the grassroots level, where socio-cultural norms remain deeply entrenched.¹

Political participation encompasses a wide range of activities, including voting in elections, contesting for political offices, engaging in political discourse, and influencing public policy. In theory, democratic systems provide equal opportunities for both men and women to participate in these processes. In practice, however, women's participation is often constrained by structural inequalities, including patriarchy, limited access to resources, and institutional discrimination². In Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State, women's political participation reflects these broader national challenges. The area, which is predominantly rural, is characterized by strong traditional institutions and cultural practices that shape gender roles and expectations. Women in Boki LGA actively participate in electoral processes as voters and play significant roles in political

¹ S. Dabup. *Gender Inequality and Political Participation in Nigeria*. Abuja: National Press, 2018. P. 35

² C. Ikeji, *et al.* "Patriarchy and Women's Political Participation in Nigeria." *Journal of African Politics*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2020, p. 45.

mobilization during campaigns. However, their involvement rarely translates into representation in elective or appointive positions. Political offices at the local government level continue to be dominated by men, thereby limiting women's influence in decision-making processes.

High levels of competition, financial demands, and, at times, violence often characterize the political environment in Nigeria, including Boki LGA, for instance. These factors disproportionately disadvantage women, who generally have less access to financial resources and political networks. Additionally, societal perceptions that associate leadership with masculinity further discourage women from seeking political office³. Despite these challenges, there have been gradual improvements in women's political awareness and engagement over the years. Civil society organizations, women's advocacy groups, and government initiatives have contributed to increasing awareness about the importance of women's participation in politics. However, the gap between participation and representation remains significant.

This study examines the nature, extent, challenges, and prospects of women's political participation in Boki Local Government Area from 1999 to 2023. By situating the analysis within the broader context of Nigeria's democratic development, the paper aims to contribute to the discourse on gender equality and political inclusion at the grassroots level.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored in the Feminist Political Theory by John Stuart Mill (1869). The theory examines how gender inequalities are embedded in political institutions, structures, and practices. It challenges the male-dominated nature of politics and advocates for equal participation

³ H. Nwoba. *Political Participation and Gender Representation in Nigeria*. Enugu: Academic Publishing, 2017. P. 7

and representation of women in governance. The theory argues that traditional political systems are inherently biased against women due to patriarchal norms and institutional barriers. It emphasizes the need for structural transformation to achieve gender equality in politics.

This theory is relevant to this paper in so many respects, viz., the theory provides a framework for understanding why women in Boki LGA are underrepresented in politics despite active participation. Secondly, the theory highlights structural barriers. It identifies socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors as key obstacles to women's political participation. Thirdly, it advocates for inclusion policies. The theory supports the adoption of affirmative action, gender quotas, and policy reforms to enhance women's representation. Finally, the theory pronounces. It emphasizes the need for education, economic empowerment, and capacity building for women.

Concept of Women's Political Participation

Women's political participation refers to the involvement of women in political processes, governance structures, and decision-making institutions at various levels of society. It encompasses activities such as voting, contesting elections, engaging in political discourse, policy advocacy, and participation in political parties and civic organizations. According to Nwoba, political participation is not limited to formal political offices but includes both direct and indirect engagement in governance processes.

From a democratic perspective, women's political participation is fundamental to inclusiveness, equality, and legitimacy in governance. A political system that excludes women who constitute nearly half of the population cannot be considered fully representative. As noted

by Tama and Maiwuya⁴, women's inclusion in politics leads to more responsive governance, particularly in areas such as healthcare, education, and social welfare. In Nigeria, women's political participation has historically been low due to colonial legacies, patriarchal structures, and socio-economic inequalities. Although women actively participate as voters and grassroots mobilizers, their representation in elective and appointive offices remains disproportionately low. This reflects a gap between participation (quantitative involvement) and representation (qualitative influence). Women's political participation must be understood within the broader socio-cultural and institutional context⁵. In rural areas like Boki Local Government Area, participation is shaped by traditional norms, economic realities, and political structures that limit women's access to power.

Level and Nature of Women's Political Participation in Boki Local Government Area, 1999–2023

The level and nature of women's political participation in Boki Local Government Area (LGA) of Cross River State between 1999 and 2023 reflect a complex interplay of progress and persistent marginalization. While the return to democratic governance in 1999 created new opportunities for citizen engagement, women in Boki LGA have continued to experience limited inclusion in formal political structures. Their participation has largely been concentrated in informal and supportive roles rather than in decision-making positions.

At the most basic level, women in Boki LGA have demonstrated significant engagement in electoral processes. Elections in Nigeria consistently record high turnout among women, and Boki is no exception. Women often participate actively as voters, motivated by their interest in

⁴ H. Nwoba. *Political Participation and Gender Representation in Nigeria*. Enugu: Academic Publishing, 2017. P. 9

community development and governance outcomes. This high level of electoral participation underscores the recognition among women of their civic responsibilities and political rights. However, this quantitative participation has not translated into qualitative representation in leadership positions⁵.

Beyond voting, women in Boki LGA also engage in political mobilization and grassroots campaigning. During election periods, women play crucial roles in rallying support for candidates, organizing community meetings, and disseminating political messages. Their involvement is particularly evident in door-to-door campaigns, market sensitization, and participation in political rallies. These activities highlight the importance of women as political actors at the grassroots level. Despite their contributions, such roles are often undervalued and rarely lead to opportunities for political advancement.⁶

Membership of political parties represents another dimension of women's political participation in Boki LGA. Women are members of various political parties and often participate in party meetings and activities. In some cases, women hold positions within party structures, particularly in women's wings or auxiliary groups. However, these positions are typically peripheral and lack significant influence over party decision-making processes. The core leadership of political parties remains dominated by men, limiting women's ability to influence candidate selection and policy direction.⁷

⁵ C. Ikeji, et al. "Patriarchy and Women's Political Participation in Nigeria." *Journal of African Politics*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2020, p. 45

⁶ S. K Arop and S. S Adaka. *Factors affecting women's participation in community development in Boki LGA*. 2024. P.30

⁷ S. K Arop and S. S Adaka. *Factors affecting women's participation in community development in Kakwagom-Boki LGA*. 2025. P.21

In terms of contesting elections, the level of women's participation in Boki LGA has remained notably low throughout the period under review. From 1999 to 2023, only a small number of women have contested for elective positions such as local government chairperson, councillorship, or state assembly representation. Even fewer have been successful. This pattern reflects broader national trends, where women are significantly underrepresented in elective offices. The low rate of female candidacy can be attributed to several factors, including financial constraints, lack of political support, and societal perceptions that discourage women from seeking leadership roles.⁸

The nature of women's political participation in Boki LGA is also shaped by socio-cultural dynamics. The area is characterized by strong traditional norms that define gender roles and expectations. Women are often expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities, which limits the time and energy they can devote to political activities. Additionally, leadership is frequently perceived as a male domain, and women who aspire to political office may face social stigma or resistance. These cultural factors contribute to the marginalization of women in formal political spaces.

Economic factors further influence the level of women's political participation in Boki LGA. Politics in Nigeria is highly capital-intensive, requiring substantial financial resources for campaign activities, party nominations, and electoral logistics. Many women in Boki LGA lack access to such resources, which significantly limits their ability to compete with male candidates.

⁸ H. Nwoba. *Political Participation and Gender Representation in Nigeria*. Enugu: Academic Publishing, 2017. P. 7

Economic dependency on male family members can also restrict women's autonomy in making political decisions, further constraining their participation.

Education and political awareness also play a critical role in shaping women's participation. While there have been improvements in educational attainment over the years, many women in rural areas like Boki still face barriers to accessing quality education. Lower levels of education can reduce political awareness and confidence, making it more difficult for women to engage effectively in political processes. However, it is important to note that increased access to education has contributed to a gradual rise in political consciousness among women in the area.⁹.

Another important aspect of women's political participation in Boki LGA is their involvement in community-based organizations and informal political structures. Women often participate in cooperative societies, market associations, and religious groups, which serve as platforms for collective action and advocacy. Through these organizations, women are able to influence community decisions and mobilize resources for development initiatives. Although these activities do not always translate into formal political power, they represent significant forms of political engagement and agency.

The period from 1999 to 2023 has also witnessed increased advocacy for women's political inclusion at both national and local levels. Civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies have implemented programs aimed at empowering women politically. These initiatives include voter education campaigns, leadership training, and advocacy for gender quotas. In Boki LGA, such efforts have contributed to raising awareness about

⁹ J. Tama and A. Maiwuya. "Women in Nigerian Politics: Challenges and Prospects." *International Journal of Governance*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2021, p. 120.

the importance of women's participation in politics. However, the impact of these initiatives has been limited by structural barriers and inadequate implementation¹⁰.

Despite these challenges, there have been some notable improvements in the level of women's political participation in recent years. More women are becoming politically aware and expressing interest in leadership roles. The presence of female role models in Nigerian politics has also inspired women at the grassroots level to aspire to political office. Additionally, the increasing use of media and communication technologies has provided new avenues for political engagement and advocacy. Nevertheless, the gap between participation and representation remains significant. While women in Boki LGA are actively involved in political processes, their influence on decision-making remains limited. This disparity highlights the need for targeted interventions to address the structural and cultural barriers that hinder women's political advancement.

The nature of women's political participation in Boki LGA can therefore be described as predominantly supportive and informal rather than leadership-oriented. Women contribute significantly to the functioning of the political system through voting, mobilization, and community engagement. However, they are largely excluded from positions of power where key decisions are made. This pattern reflects a broader trend in Nigerian politics, where women's contributions are recognized but not adequately rewarded with representation.

The level and nature of women's political participation in Boki Local Government Area between 1999 and 2023 reveal a paradox of active involvement and limited representation. While women have embraced their roles as voters, mobilizers, and community actors, they continue to face significant barriers to leadership and decision-making. Addressing this imbalance requires a

¹⁰ S. Dabup. *Gender Inequality and Political Participation in Nigeria*. Abuja: National Press, 2018. P. 35.

comprehensive approach that includes policy reforms, economic empowerment, education, and cultural transformation. Only through such efforts can women in Boki LGA achieve meaningful participation in politics and contribute fully to the democratic process.

Factors Affecting Women's Political Participation in Boki Local Government Area 1999–2023

Women's political participation in Boki Local Government Area is shaped by a combination of socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors that interact to limit their effective involvement in governance. Although democratic rule since 1999 has provided a framework for inclusive participation, these structural barriers continue to restrict women's access to political power.

Socio-Cultural Factors

Socio-cultural norms represent one of the most significant barriers to women's political participation in Boki LGA. The area is deeply rooted in traditional values that define gender roles in ways that prioritize male dominance in public affairs while assigning women to domestic responsibilities. Within this framework, leadership is often perceived as a male prerogative, and women who aspire to political positions may be viewed as deviating from societal expectations.

Patriarchal structures reinforce these norms by granting men authority over household and community decision-making processes. In many cases, women require the consent or support of male family members before engaging in political activities. This dependence limits women's autonomy and reduces their ability to participate actively in politics.¹¹ Furthermore, cultural

¹¹ S. K Arop and S. S Adaka. *Factors affecting women's participation in community development in Boki LGA*. 2024. P.30

stereotypes that portray women as emotional or less capable of leadership continue to undermine their credibility as political actors.

Marriage and family responsibilities also play a crucial role in shaping women's participation. In Boki LGA, women are often expected to prioritize childcare, household management, and agricultural labor. These responsibilities limit the time and energy available for political engagement. Political activities, which often require long hours, travel, and public visibility, may conflict with societal expectations of women's roles, thereby discouraging their participation.¹²

Religion also influences political participation in the study area. Religious teachings and interpretations sometimes reinforce traditional gender roles, emphasizing women's submissiveness and discouraging public leadership. Although religion can also serve as a platform for mobilization and empowerment, its conservative interpretations often act as a barrier to women's political involvement.

Additionally, societal attitudes toward female politicians contribute to low participation. Women who engage in politics may face stigma, discrimination, and even character assassination. Politics in Nigeria is often perceived as a "dirty game," and women who participate may be judged harshly or accused of moral compromise. Such perceptions discourage many women from contesting elections or taking active roles in political processes.

Economic Factors

¹² S. K Arop and S. S Adaka. *Factors affecting women's participation in community development in Kwagom-Boki LGA*. 2025. P.21

Economic constraints constitute another major barrier to women's political participation in Boki LGA. Politics in Nigeria is highly capital-intensive, requiring significant financial resources for campaign activities, party nominations, and voter mobilization. Women, who generally have less access to financial resources than men, are at a disadvantage in this regard. In Boki LGA, many women are engaged in subsistence farming, petty trading, and informal economic activities that generate limited income. This economic reality restricts their ability to finance political campaigns or contribute financially to political parties. As a result, women are often excluded from key decision-making processes within political parties, where financial contributions are highly valued.¹³

Economic dependency further exacerbates the problem. Many women rely on male family members for financial support, which can limit their independence in making political decisions. In some cases, women may be discouraged from participating in politics due to concerns about financial risks or the potential loss of family support. The high cost of political participation also discourages women from contesting elections. Expenses associated with nomination forms, campaign logistics, and media coverage can be prohibitive. Even when women are interested in running for office, the lack of financial resources often forces them to withdraw or seek less competitive positions. Moreover, economic inequality contributes to unequal access to education and political awareness. Women with limited financial resources may have fewer opportunities to acquire education and develop the skills necessary for effective political participation. This lack

¹³ S. Dabup. *Gender Inequality and Political Participation in Nigeria*. Abuja: National Press, 2018. P. 35.

of capacity further limits their ability to compete with their male counterparts, who have greater access to resources and opportunities.¹⁴

Institutional Factors

Institutional barriers within the political system also play a critical role in limiting women's participation in Boki LGA. Political parties, which serve as the primary platforms for political engagement, often exhibit discriminatory practices that disadvantage women. One major issue is the lack of internal democracy within political parties. Candidate selection processes are often influenced by powerful party elites, who tend to favor male candidates. Women are frequently marginalized during the nomination process and may be denied party tickets or assigned to less competitive positions.¹⁵

Additionally, the absence of effective implementation of gender policies contributes to low participation. Although Nigeria has adopted policies such as the National Gender Policy, which recommends a minimum of 35% representation for women, these policies are not legally binding and are rarely enforced. As a result, women's representation in political offices remains significantly below the recommended threshold.

The political environment itself presents challenges. Elections in Nigeria are often characterized by violence, intimidation, and irregularities. Such conditions create an unsafe environment for women, who may be more vulnerable to harassment and abuse. The fear of

¹⁴ J. Tama and A. Maiwuya. "Women in Nigerian Politics: Challenges and Prospects." *International Journal of Governance*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2021, p. 120.

¹⁵ S. Dabup. *Gender Inequality and Political Participation in Nigeria*. Abuja: National Press, 2018. P. 35.

violence discourages many women from participating actively in politics, particularly as candidates. Furthermore, limited access to political networks and mentorship opportunities affects women's participation. Politics in Nigeria is heavily reliant on networks, alliances, and patronage systems. Women, who are often excluded from these networks, find it difficult to gain the support needed to succeed in politics.¹⁶

In Boki LGA, the rural nature of the area also contributes to institutional challenges. Limited access to media, information, and political education reduces women's awareness of their rights and opportunities. This lack of information further limits their ability to engage effectively in political processes.

Prospects and Strategies in Enhancing Women's Political Participation in Boki Local Government Area

Despite the numerous challenges facing women's political participation in Boki LGA, there are significant prospects for improvement. With appropriate strategies and interventions, it is possible to enhance women's involvement in politics and promote gender equality in governance. One of the key prospects for enhancing women's participation is the increasing level of education and awareness among women. Over the years, more women in Boki LGA have gained access to formal education, thereby improving their political consciousness and confidence. Educated women are more likely to participate in political activities and aspire to leadership positions. The growing influence of civil society organizations and women's advocacy groups also presents opportunities for improvement. These organizations play a crucial role in mobilizing women, providing training, and advocating for gender equality in politics. Their activities have

¹⁶ H. Nwoba. *Political Participation and Gender Representation in Nigeria*. Enugu: Academic Publishing, 2017, p. 7

contributed to raising awareness about the importance of women's participation and challenging discriminatory practices.

Technological advancements and increased access to media have also created new avenues for political engagement. Social media platforms and communication technologies enable women to access information, network with others, and participate in political discourse. These tools can help bridge the gap between participation and representation. Additionally, the presence of female role models in Nigerian politics serves as an inspiration for women at the grassroots level. Successful female politicians demonstrate that women can excel in leadership roles, thereby encouraging others to pursue similar paths.¹⁷

Strategies for Enhancing Participation

Implementation of Affirmative Action Policies: One of the most effective strategies for increasing women's participation is implementing affirmative action policies. Enforcing gender quotas in political appointments and elective positions can help ensure that women are adequately represented in governance. Legal frameworks should back such policies to ensure compliance.

Economic Empowerment: Economic empowerment is essential for enhancing women's political participation. Providing women with access to financial resources, credit facilities, and income-generating opportunities can improve their ability to fund political activities. Empowered women are more likely to participate actively in politics and contest elections.¹⁸

Education and Capacity Building: Investing in education and capacity-building programs can enhance women's political participation. Training programs on leadership, political processes, and

¹⁷ J. Tama and A. Maiwuya. "Women in Nigerian Politics: Challenges and Prospects." *International Journal of Governance*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2021, p. 120.

¹⁸ S. Dabup. *Gender Inequality and Political Participation in Nigeria*. Abuja: National Press, 2018. P. 35.

campaign strategies can equip women with the skills needed to succeed in politics. Civic education initiatives can also raise awareness about women's rights and responsibilities.

Reform of Political Party Structures

Political parties must adopt inclusive practices that promote women's participation. This includes transparent candidate selection processes, reduced nomination fees for women, and the creation of supportive environments for female candidates. Parties should also ensure that women occupy key leadership positions within their structures.

Cultural Reorientation: Addressing socio-cultural barriers requires a shift in societal attitudes toward gender roles. Community leaders, traditional institutions, and religious organizations should promote gender equality and support women's participation in politics. Public awareness campaigns can help challenge stereotypes and encourage acceptance of female leadership.¹⁹

Strengthening Women's Networks: Building strong networks and support systems for women can enhance their political participation. Women's organizations, mentorship programs, and alliances can provide the support needed for women to navigate the political landscape.

Ensuring Political Security: Creating a safe, secure political environment is essential to encouraging women's participation. Measures should be taken to prevent violence and harassment during elections, thereby enabling women to participate without fear. The prospects for enhancing women's political participation in Boki Local Government Area are promising but require deliberate and sustained efforts. While progress has been made in raising awareness and promoting inclusion, significant challenges remain. By addressing socio-cultural, economic, and institutional

¹⁹ P. Kaka and S. Adaka. "Women and Grassroots Politics in Cross River State." *Nigerian Journal of Social Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2019, p. 88.

barriers and implementing targeted strategies, it is possible to achieve greater gender equality in political participation.

Conclusion

The paper reveals that women in Boki Local Government Area play significant roles in political processes, particularly as voters, mobilizers, and community influencers. However, their participation remains largely informal and supportive, with minimal representation in decision-making positions. This disparity highlights the persistent influence of socio-cultural norms, economic constraints, and institutional barriers that limit women's political advancement. Despite efforts by government and civil society organizations, progress has been slow and uneven. The continued dominance of men in political leadership underscores the need for deliberate and sustained interventions. The study also demonstrates that increasing women's political participation is not only a matter of equity but also essential for effective governance and sustainable development. Ultimately, achieving meaningful political inclusion for women in Boki LGA requires a comprehensive approach that addresses structural inequalities and promotes cultural transformation.

Based on the following, this work recommended as follows; Government should implement legally binding quotas to ensure at least 35% representation of women in political offices; Provide financial support, grants, and credit facilities to enable women to participate in politics, promote girl-child education and adult literacy programs to enhance political awareness, reduce nomination fees and ensure transparent candidate selection processes; sensitize communities on the importance of women's leadership in governance, encourage mentorship programs and political alliances among women and ensure a violence-free political environment to encourage women's participation.

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