



GENDER INEQUALITY AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN SOUTHERN TARABA SENATORIAL ZONE



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Abstract

Despite Nigeria's democratic progress since 1999, women's political participation in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone remains critically low. Persistent gender inequality continues to marginalize women from political leadership and decision-making processes, thereby undermining inclusive governance and democratic development. This study examined gender inequality and women's participation in politics in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone. Specifically, it identified the factors responsible for gender inequality and low political participation among women and examined measures for improving their participation in politics. The study was anchored on Liberal Feminist Theory and adopted a descriptive survey research design. Data were collected through structured questionnaire administered to 400 respondents drawn from a population of 1,165,300, with the sample size determined using Taro Yamane formula. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that religious restrictions, low socio-economic status, patriarchy, stigmatization, electoral violence, intimidation, and inadequate financial resources constitute the major factors responsible for gender inequality and the low participation of women in politics (grand mean = 3.30). The study concluded that socio-cultural, economic, and political barriers continue to hinder women's effective participation in politics in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone. It recommended that governments and other stakeholder should strengthen political education, provide financial support for female aspirants, enforce affirmative action and gender quota policies, combat electoral violence, and promote reforms that eliminate discriminatory cultural and religious practices.

Keywords: Gender inequality, Women's political participation, Liberal Feminist Theory, Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone

Introduction

Gender inequality and women participation in politics remain global concerns that continue to attract scholarly and policy attention. Across the world, women have historically been underrepresented in political leadership and decision-making processes despite constituting nearly half of the global population. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2023), women occupy only 26.2% of parliamentary seats globally, reflecting the persistent imbalance in political representation between men and women. This disparity highlights the systemic barriers that limit women's access to political power and leadership opportunities. The participation of women in politics is widely regarded as an important indicator of gender equality and democratic development because meaningful national development can only be achieved when both men and women actively participate in governance and decision-making

processes. Consequently, the exclusion or underrepresentation of women in politics undermines democratic values, weakens inclusiveness and perpetuates social inequality.

In Africa, the issue of gender inequality in politics is equally evident. Although the continent has witnessed gradual improvement in women's political representation, women still occupy fewer political positions compared to men. According to the World Bank Gender Data Portal (based on Inter-Parliamentary Union data), women held approximately 24.5–27% of parliamentary seats in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2023, depending on the aggregation method used. While countries such as Rwanda have achieved over 60% female representation in parliament, many African countries continue to experience barriers such as patriarchal norms, political violence, poverty, and cultural restrictions that limit women's political participation. Scholars have argued that women are not absent from politics because they lack the interest or capability, but because societal structures and gender stereotypes often place them at a disadvantage in political competition (Adegbite, 2021). These challenges continue to limit women's political visibility and influence across the continent.

In Nigeria, gender inequality in politics remains a serious concern despite numerous policies and international commitments aimed at promoting women's inclusion in governance. Nigeria has one of the lowest rates of female political representation in Africa. According to the Global Gender Gap Report (2023), Nigeria ranked 130th out of 146 countries, with political empowerment declining significantly from 11.9% to 4.1%. Women currently occupy approximately 6.3% of seats in the National Assembly, indicating a huge gender imbalance in political representation. Statistics from the 10th National Assembly reveal that out of 109 senators, only 3 are women, while only 17 women occupy seats out of the 360 members of the House of Representatives. Similarly, women remain poorly represented in executive and appointive positions, as only 8 out of 45 ministers are women, while none of the 36 state governors is female. Furthermore, only 48 women emerged victorious out of 1,019 female candidates who contested in the 2023 State Houses of Assembly elections, representing just 4.7%, which falls below the 30% affirmative action recommended by the Beijing Platform for Action and the Nigerian National Gender Policy. Despite Nigeria's commitment to promoting gender equality through policies such as the National Gender Policy, women continue to face numerous barriers which have continued to hinder their active participation in politics and governance. The persistent underrepresentation of women raises concerns about inclusiveness in national development and democratic governance in Nigeria.

In Taraba State, the situation is not significantly different, as women's political participation remains relatively low. Although women constitute a substantial proportion of the population, their representation in elective and appointive political offices remains minimal. In the Taraba State House of Assembly, only two women Hajiya Batulu Muhammed and Veronica Alhassan were elected out of the 24 available seats, demonstrating the continued dominance of men in the political structure of the state. The situation is even worse in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone, where women continue to experience marginalization in political participation and leadership. Despite their contributions to community development and electoral processes, women in the zone are still largely excluded from decision-making positions and political leadership. All the five local government chairmen in the zone are male and all the local government councilors are all men. Since 1999 all the members of the State House of Assembly, members House of Representatives and the senate in the area were men. Tama and Maiwuya (2022) observed that women's participation in politics in Taraba State has not been encouraging, as many women who contest elective positions often fail to emerge victorious, thereby reinforcing the belief that politics is exclusively a male affair. Although several studies have examined women's political participation in other parts of Nigeria, there is limited

empirical research specifically focusing on gender inequality and women's participation in politics in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone. Against this backdrop, there is a compelling need for an empirical investigation into the factors responsible for gender inequality and the persistent underrepresentation of women in politics in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone.

Despite global and national campaigns advocating gender equality and women empowerment, women in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone continue to experience low political participation and poor representation in elective and appointive political positions. Although women contribute significantly to electoral activities such as voting, campaigning, and mobilization, they are largely excluded from leadership and decision-making processes due to cultural stereotypes, patriarchy, poverty, political violence, and inadequate educational and economic opportunities. The dominance of male-oriented political structures and discriminatory societal attitudes has continued to discourage women from contesting political offices. Consequently, the persistent marginalization of women in politics undermines democratic development, gender equity and inclusive governance in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone. It is against this background that this study examines gender inequality and women participation in politics in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone.

The general objective of the study is gender inequality and women participation in politics in southern Taraba Senatorial Zone. However, the specific objectives are:

- i. To examine the factors responsible for gender inequality and low women participation in politics in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone.
- ii. To suggest measures for improving women's participation in political in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone.

Literature Review

Several factors have been identified in the literature as responsible for the underrepresentation of women in politics. These factors are social, cultural, economic, political and institutional in nature.

Stigmatization

One of the major barriers to women's political participation is societal stigmatization. In Nigeria, politics is often perceived as a dirty game characterized by violence, manipulation, dishonesty, and moral compromise. As a result, women who participate in politics are frequently labeled as shameless or morally loose. Osimen et al. (2018) argued that female political aspirants are often viewed negatively because society believes that women who engage in politics have abandoned traditional feminine virtues. This negative societal perception discourages many women from participating actively in politics for fear of damaging their reputation and social standing.

Socio-Economic Factors

Socio-economic inequality also contributes significantly to women's marginalization in politics. Women generally have less access to education, employment opportunities, and economic resources compared to men. According to Duflo (2012), economic inequality reduces women's ability to participate effectively in politics because political activities require financial resources for campaigns, consultations, and party activities. Limited access to quality education also affects women's political awareness, confidence, and leadership capacity.

Patriarchy

Remains one of the strongest barriers to women's political empowerment in Nigeria. Patriarchy refers to a social system in which men dominate political, economic and family structures while women are confined to subordinate roles. Osimen et al. (2018) explained that patriarchal beliefs

portray women primarily as housewives and caregivers rather than political leaders. Tama and Maiwuya (2022) further argued that women's participation in politics in Taraba State has been discouraging because society perceives politics as a male domain. Consequently, many women are denied support during elections, while female aspirants are often considered weaker and less competent than their male counterparts.

Ethnicity

Nigeria's multi-ethnic structure also affects women's political participation. Ayeomoni (2012) noted that Nigeria has over 500 languages and numerous ethnic groups, while Taraba State alone has close to 80 indigenous ethnic groups. Ethnic divisions weaken solidarity among women and reduce collective support for female candidates. Ikpe (2004) argued that ethnic and party loyalties often take precedence over gender solidarity, thereby weakening women's collective political action.

Cultural Norms and Traditional Beliefs

Continue to limit women's participation in public life. Nussbaum (2005) maintained that societies that strongly emphasize traditional gender roles often restrict women's access to leadership positions. Similarly, Kabeer (2016) observed that cultural expectations confine women to domestic responsibilities, thereby reducing their visibility in political and public affairs.

Religion

Religion also plays a significant role in shaping women's political participation. According to Oluyemi (2016), both Christianity and Islam have often been interpreted in ways that restrict women's involvement in public leadership. Osimen et al. (2018) noted that religious practices such as the implementation of Sharia law in some northern states limit women's interaction in public spaces and political activities. Tama and Maiwuya (2022) argued that many Nigerians place religious beliefs above constitutional provisions on gender equality, thereby hindering women's political empowerment.

Financing

Political participation in Nigeria is highly capital-intensive. Campaigns, party nominations, consultations, and mobilization require substantial financial resources. Osimen et al. (2018) observed that many women lack the financial capacity to compete effectively with men in politics despite fee waivers occasionally granted by political parties. Since many women are economically disadvantaged, they are unable to finance political campaigns or secure political influence within parties, thereby reducing their chances of electoral success.

Political Violence

Political violence is another major obstacle to women's political participation in Nigeria. Elections in Nigeria are frequently characterized by intimidation, harassment, thuggery, and violent confrontations. According to Osimen et al. (2018), many women are unwilling to participate actively in politics because they cannot withstand the violent nature of electoral contests. Fear of physical attacks, harassment, and political victimization discourages many women from contesting elective positions.

Godfatherism

Godfatherism also contributes significantly to women's marginalization in politics. Political godfathers are influential individuals who determine who gets political nominations and appointments. Osimen et al. (2018) explained that political godfathers control access to political opportunities and resources, thereby limiting participation to individuals within their networks. Eze, (2023) aver that godfathers prefer to deal with the male folk, who they find

more easily to influence and bind to an agreement. This situation makes it more difficult for women to come to an equal playing field with the male folk.

The reviewed literature indicates that women's low participation in politics is largely influenced by socio-cultural, economic, religious, and institutional factors, including patriarchy, cultural norms, financial constraints, and electoral violence. Scholars also agree that interventions such as political education, financial empowerment, affirmative action, and institutional reforms can enhance women's political participation. However, most existing studies have focused on the national level or other parts of Nigeria, with limited empirical evidence from Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone. Moreover, few studies have simultaneously examined both the factors responsible for gender inequality and the measures for improving women's political participation within the study area. This study addresses this gap by providing empirical evidence from Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone, thereby contributing to a better understanding of the challenges and possible strategies for promoting women's political inclusion.

Tama and Maiwuya (2022) conducted a study on women and political participation in Taraba State using documentary and content analysis methods. The study found that women who contested political offices were often rejected by male voters who perceived women as incapable of leadership. The study also revealed that religious and cultural beliefs were major factors responsible for women's low representation in politics.

Measures for Improving Women's Participation in Politics

Women's political participation has remained a global concern due to persistent gender inequality in representation and decision-making processes. Scholars argue that improving women's participation requires a combination of legal, institutional, socio-economic, and cultural interventions aimed at removing structural barriers (Hessami & Lopes da Fonseca, 2020).

Political Education and Civic Awareness

One of the key measures for enhancing women's political participation is political education and civic awareness. Studies show that women's limited exposure to political processes, leadership training, and civic knowledge reduces their confidence and willingness to contest elections (Francovich et al., 2023). Political education strengthens political efficacy by increasing awareness of rights, leadership opportunities, and electoral procedures. Similarly, liberal feminist perspectives argue that education empowers women to challenge patriarchal norms and actively engage in governance (Adefisoye, 2023). Civic engagement programs, leadership workshops, and voter sensitization campaigns are therefore essential in improving women's participation in politics.

Economic Empowerment and Financial Support

Financial constraints remain one of the most significant barriers to women's political participation. Campaign financing, nomination fees, and mobilization costs often disadvantage women candidates (Umeh et al., 2023). Research in Nigeria shows that lack of access to financial resources prevents qualified women from competing effectively with male counterparts in elections (Ette & Akpan-Obong, 2022). Consequently, scholars recommend targeted interventions such as campaign subsidies, access to credit facilities, and donor-supported funding for female aspirants as effective strategies for improving women's political inclusion (Hessami & Lopes da Fonseca, 2020).

Affirmative Action and Gender Quotas

Institutional reforms such as gender quotas and affirmative action policies have been widely recognized as effective mechanisms for increasing women's representation. According to Hessami and Lopes da Fonseca (2020), countries that implement quota systems tend to record

higher levels of female representation in legislative bodies. In Nigeria, the National Gender Policy recommends a 35% affirmative action framework aimed at improving women's participation in governance, although implementation remains weak (Adefisoye, 2023). Effective enforcement of quotas ensures that political parties and institutions allocate space for women in elective and appointive positions.

Reduction of Electoral Violence and Political Intimidation

Electoral violence and political intimidation discourage women from active political participation. Studies show that women are less likely to contest elections in environments characterized by insecurity and harassment (Umeh et al., 2023). Violence against women in politics limits their mobility, confidence, and electoral competitiveness. Therefore, strengthening electoral laws, improving security during elections, and enforcing sanctions against political violence are critical measures for increasing women's participation in politics (Ette & Akpan-Obong, 2022).

Cultural and Social Norm Transformation

Cultural beliefs and patriarchal norms remain major barriers to women's political engagement. In many societies, politics is perceived as a male-dominated field, which limits women's access to leadership opportunities (Francovich et al., 2023). Gender stereotypes often discourage women from pursuing political careers due to societal expectations regarding domestic roles. Scholars recommend sustained public enlightenment campaigns, media advocacy, and community-based interventions to challenge harmful gender norms (Adefisoye, 2023). Changing societal attitudes is essential for achieving long-term gender equality in political participation.

Political Party Support and Mentorship

Political parties play a crucial role in recruiting, sponsoring, and promoting candidates. However, women often face exclusion within party structures due to male dominance in decision-making processes (Ette & Akpan-Obong, 2022). Lack of mentorship and sponsorship further limits women's political advancement. Mentorship programs, leadership pipelines, and internal party reforms are recommended to support women's political careers and ensure equal opportunities in party nominations (Hessami & Lopes da Fonseca, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Liberal Feminist Theory emerged from the intellectual tradition of classical liberalism during the Enlightenment period of the eighteenth century. Classical liberalism emphasized the principles of individual liberty, equality before the law, rationality, and the protection of fundamental human rights. While these principles were widely celebrated, early liberal thinkers largely restricted their application to men, excluding women from political participation, education, property ownership, and civic life. Liberal feminism developed as a critique of this contradiction, arguing that if all human beings possess the capacity for reason and moral judgment, then women should enjoy the same legal, political, economic, and educational rights as men (Tong & Botts, 2018).

The formal intellectual foundation of Liberal Feminist Theory is commonly traced to Mary Wollstonecraft's seminal work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), in which she challenged prevailing assumptions that women were naturally inferior to men. Wollstonecraft argued that women's subordinate status resulted not from biological incapacity but from unequal access to education and social opportunities. She maintained that women possessed the same rational abilities as men and therefore deserved equal educational opportunities, legal protections, and participation in public affairs. Her work marked one of the earliest systematic

philosophical arguments for gender equality and laid the groundwork for later feminist scholarship.

The theory was further developed during the nineteenth century by John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill, particularly through Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869). Mill argued that denying women equal rights represented one of the greatest obstacles to social progress. He advocated universal suffrage, equal educational opportunities, equal employment rights, and legal reforms that would eliminate discrimination against women. His utilitarian perspective suggested that societies could only attain maximum social welfare when women were allowed to contribute equally to political, economic, and intellectual development.

The twentieth century witnessed a significant expansion of Liberal Feminist Theory through the contributions of Simone de Beauvoir, whose influential work *The Second Sex* (1949) argued that women are not born subordinate but become socially constructed as the "Other" through cultural expectations and patriarchal institutions. De Beauvoir demonstrated that gender inequality is socially produced rather than biologically determined. Her work profoundly influenced second-wave feminism by highlighting how socialization, education, religion, family institutions, and political systems reproduce women's marginalization.

During the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, scholars such as Betty Friedan, Susan Moller Okin, Martha Nussbaum, and Martha Minow expanded liberal feminist thought by advocating reforms in employment, reproductive rights, education, political representation, and anti-discrimination legislation. Contemporary liberal feminists continue to emphasize equal opportunity, affirmative action, gender mainstreaming, inclusive governance, and institutional reforms as mechanisms for achieving gender equality within democratic societies.

Epistemologically, Liberal Feminist Theory is grounded in the belief that knowledge about gender inequality should be derived from rational inquiry, empirical evidence, democratic principles, and universal human rights rather than cultural traditions or biological determinism. It assumes that gender inequalities are socially constructed and maintained through discriminatory institutions and practices, making them amenable to legal and policy reforms. Several scholars and philosophers have significantly contributed to the development of Liberal Feminist Theory.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) is widely regarded as the founder of liberal feminism. She argued that women possess the same intellectual capacities as men and deserve equal educational and political opportunities. Her writings challenged patriarchal assumptions that justified women's exclusion from public life.

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) advocated legal equality, women's suffrage, and equal access to education and employment. Together with Harriet Taylor Mill, he argued that societal progress depends upon removing legal barriers that prevent women from realizing their full potential.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986) expanded liberal feminist thought by demonstrating that gender inequality is socially constructed through institutions and cultural practices rather than biological differences. Her famous assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" remains one of the foundational ideas in feminist scholarship.

Other influential liberal feminists include Betty Friedan, whose work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) exposed the limitations imposed on women by traditional domestic roles; Susan Moller Okin, who examined gender justice within families and political institutions; and Martha

Nussbaum, whose Capabilities Approach emphasizes expanding women's freedoms and opportunities as prerequisites for social justice and development.

Liberal Feminist Theory rests on several interconnected assumptions.

First, the theory assumes that women and men possess equal rational capacities and therefore deserve equal rights and opportunities. Any observed differences in achievement are attributed primarily to unequal access to education, employment, political participation, and economic resources rather than biological differences.

Second, liberal feminists argue that gender inequality is produced by discriminatory laws, institutional practices, cultural stereotypes, and unequal socialization processes. These structural barriers limit women's participation in decision-making and leadership positions.

Third, the theory assumes that democratic societies should guarantee equal citizenship irrespective of gender. Equal participation in politics, governance, education, employment, and public life is considered both a human right and a requirement for democratic development.

Fourth, liberal feminism maintains that social change can be achieved through peaceful reforms rather than revolutionary transformation. It advocates constitutional reforms, legal protections, affirmative action, anti-discrimination policies, gender-sensitive legislation, and institutional restructuring as mechanisms for achieving equality.

Finally, the theory assumes that increasing women's educational attainment, economic independence, political awareness, and access to leadership opportunities will reduce gender disparities and promote inclusive governance.

Liberal Feminist Theory provides an appropriate analytical framework for examining women's political participation in Southern Taraba because it explains women's underrepresentation as a consequence of structural inequalities rather than innate incapacity. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality in Nigeria, women continue to experience significant barriers in accessing political office and participating effectively in governance.

The theory helps explain how discriminatory political party structures, unequal educational opportunities, financial constraints, limited access to political networks, and patriarchal cultural norms collectively reduce women's political participation. It also highlights how informal political institutions often reproduce gender inequalities by excluding women from candidate selection processes, campaign financing, and leadership positions.

Within the context of Southern Taraba, the theory is particularly useful in explaining how socio-cultural expectations regarding gender roles discourage women's active participation in politics. Traditional beliefs that assign leadership to men while confining women to domestic responsibilities continue to influence electoral behaviour, political recruitment, and public perceptions of female leadership. Liberal feminism interprets these challenges as institutional rather than biological, suggesting that they can be addressed through reforms.

The theory further supports policy recommendations such as political education for women, affirmative action measures, economic empowerment programmes, leadership training, legal reforms, gender-sensitive political party practices, improved access to campaign financing, and public awareness campaigns aimed at reducing gender stereotypes. These interventions directly correspond with the study's objective of identifying barriers to women's political participation and proposing practical strategies for increasing women's representation in governance.

Strengths of Liberal Feminist Theory

Liberal Feminist Theory possesses several strengths that make it particularly relevant for studies of women's political participation. First major strength is its emphasis on equality before the law and equal access to opportunities. By advocating constitutional protections and anti-discrimination legislation, the theory provides practical solutions for addressing gender inequality within existing democratic institutions. The theory also recognizes education as a powerful instrument of empowerment. It argues that expanding women's educational opportunities increases political awareness, leadership capacity, economic independence, and civic participation, thereby improving women's ability to compete effectively in politics.

Another strength lies in its policy-oriented nature. Rather than merely criticizing gender inequality, liberal feminism proposes concrete interventions such as affirmative action, gender quotas, equal employment policies, leadership development programmes, and institutional reforms that governments and political organizations can implement. Furthermore, the theory aligns closely with international human rights instruments, including the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the African Union Maputo Protocol, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment. Consequently, it provides a globally recognized framework for promoting inclusive governance.

Finally, Liberal Feminist Theory offers a practical analytical framework for examining women's political exclusion within democratic societies, making it highly applicable to empirical studies such as the present investigation of women's political participation in Southern Taraba.

Weaknesses of Liberal Feminist Theory

Despite its contributions, Liberal Feminist Theory has attracted substantial criticism from other feminist perspectives. A major criticism is that the theory places excessive emphasis on legal equality and institutional reforms while underestimating deeper structural systems of domination. Critics argue that simply changing laws does not automatically eliminate deeply rooted patriarchal values embedded in families, religious institutions, traditional authorities, and political cultures.

Marxist feminists contend that liberal feminism neglects the role of capitalism and class inequality in reinforcing women's oppression. They argue that economic exploitation intersects with gender discrimination in ways that legal reforms alone cannot resolve. Radical feminists criticize the theory for failing to challenge patriarchal power structures fundamentally. They argue that male dominance is deeply embedded in social institutions and requires more transformative social change than liberal reforms can achieve.

Postcolonial and intersectional feminists further argue that liberal feminism reflects Western assumptions that may not adequately explain women's experiences in Africa and other Global South contexts. In societies such as Southern Taraba, women's political participation is shaped not only by gender but also by ethnicity, religion, age, class, marital status, indigeneity, cultural traditions, and local power relations. These intersecting identities create forms of exclusion that extend beyond the legal and institutional focus of liberal feminism.

Additionally, the theory assumes that equal opportunities alone are sufficient to produce equal outcomes. In practice, however, women often continue to face informal discrimination, political violence, electoral intimidation, unequal campaign financing, and cultural resistance despite the existence of constitutional protections.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to describe and analyse the perceptions of respondents regarding the factors responsible for gender inequality and women's participation in politics in Southern Taraba without manipulating any of the study variables. The design was therefore suitable for examining respondents' views on the barriers to women's political participation and the measures required to improve their political inclusion.

The study was conducted in Southern Senatorial Zone of Taraba State, Nigeria. The senatorial zone is one of the three senatorial districts in the state and comprises five Local Government Areas (LGAs); Donga, Ibi, Takum, Ussa, and Wukari. The zone occupies the southern part of Taraba State and is characterized by considerable ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, with major ethnic groups including the Jukun, Kuteb, Chamba, Tiv, and several minority groups. The predominant occupations are farming, fishing, trading, and other small-scale commercial activities. Politically, Southern Taraba has played an important role in the democratic development of Taraba State since Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999. Although women actively participate in electoral activities and community development initiatives, their representation in elective and appointive political offices remains relatively low due to socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers. These characteristics make the zone appropriate for investigating gender inequality and women's political participation.

The population of the study comprised 1,165,300 residents of Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone, covering the five Local Government Areas of Donga, Ibi, Takum, Ussa, and Wukari. The population figure was obtained from the National Population Commission projected population estimates based on the 2006 National Population and Housing Census.

The Taro Yamane formula was used to determine the sample size for the study. The formula is:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = the desired sample size

N = the total population size

e = the level of precision (margin of error), set at 0.05 (i.e., 5%)

1 = a constant

Given that:

$$N = 1,165,300$$

$$e = 0.05$$

$$n = \frac{1,165,300}{1+1,165,300 (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1,165,300}{1+1,165,300 (0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{1,165,300}{1+2,913.25}$$

$$n = \frac{1,165,300}{2,914.25}$$

$$n = 399.86$$

The calculated sample size was approximated to 400 respondents

A multistage sampling technique was adopted. In the first stage, the five Local Government Areas that constitute Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone (Donga, Ibi, Takum, Ussa, and Wukari) were included in the study. In the second stage, the sample size was proportionately allocated to each Local Government Area based on its projected population to ensure adequate representation. In the third stage, respondents were selected through simple random sampling from community sampling frames compiled with the assistance of community leaders and electoral wards. This procedure ensured that every eligible respondent had an equal chance of being selected while maintaining representativeness across the study area.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher based on the objectives of the study and relevant literature. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section A contained items on respondents' demographic characteristics. Section B contained nine items measuring the factors responsible for gender inequality and women's participation in politics. Section C contained six items measuring the strategies for improving women's participation in politics. The questionnaire employed a 4-point Likert scale of: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validity by three experts in Political Science Department. Their observations and recommendations were incorporated into the final version of the instrument to ensure that the items adequately measured the objectives of the study. A pilot study involving 30 respondents outside the study area was conducted. The responses were analysed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.81, indicating that the instrument possessed satisfactory internal consistency for data collection.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher, assisted by trained research assistants, personally administered the questionnaires to the selected respondents across the five Local Government Areas. Completed questionnaires were retrieved immediately after completion or collected within an agreed period to maximise the response rate.

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, specifically mean and standard deviation. The decision rule was based on the criterion mean of 2.50, computed as:

$$\frac{4+3+2+1}{4}=2.50$$

Mean scores of 2.50 and above were regarded as Accepted, while mean scores below 2.50 were regarded as Rejected.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the appropriate departmental research committee before data collection commenced. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, and participation was entirely voluntary. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before administering the questionnaire. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and they were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without any adverse consequences. The information obtained was used solely for academic purposes.

Result**Table 1: Analysis of Factors Responsible for Gender Inequality and Low Women's Participation in Politics in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone**

S/N	Statement	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean (X)	Std. Dev.	Remarks
1	Cultural norms and traditional beliefs discourage women from active participation in politics.	215	120	35	20	3.36	0.79	Accepted
2	Religious beliefs and practices restrict women's participation in political activities.	190	130	45	25	3.25	0.84	Accepted
3	Low socio-economic status limits women's political participation and leadership ambition.	225	110	35	20	3.38	0.77	Accepted
4	Patriarchal social structures favour men over women in political leadership positions.	210	120	40	20	3.33	0.79	Accepted
5	Stigmatization and gender discrimination discourage women from contesting political offices.	205	125	40	20	3.32	0.81	Accepted
6	Electoral violence and political intimidation discourage women from participating in politics.	220	115	35	20	3.37	0.78	Accepted
7	Inadequate financial resources hinder women's ability to contest and win elections.	218	118	34	20	3.36	0.79	Accepted
8	Ethnic considerations reduce support for women seeking elective political offices.	180	135	50	25	3.21	0.85	Accepted
9	Political godfatherism limits women's access to political nominations and leadership positions.	200	120	45	25	3.27	0.83	Accepted
Grand Mean						3.32	0.81	

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The findings presented in Table 1 indicate that respondents perceived all the identified factors as significant barriers to women's participation in politics in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone, as each item recorded a mean score above the acceptance benchmark of 2.50. Among the identified barriers, low socio-economic status recorded the highest mean score (3.38), suggesting that respondents consider economic disadvantage to be the greatest impediment to women's political participation. This finding reflects the financial demands of Nigeria's electoral process, where campaign financing, nomination fees, political mobilisation, and constituency outreach require substantial economic resources that many women do not possess. In Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone, where many women depend on small-scale farming, petty trading, and other informal economic activities, limited financial capacity constrains their ability to compete effectively with male candidates. Electoral violence and political intimidation (mean = 3.37), as well as cultural norms and traditional beliefs (mean = 3.36), also emerged as major barriers, indicating that socio-cultural expectations and the perceived risks associated with political participation continue to discourage women from seeking elective

office. Although ethnicity (mean = 3.21) recorded the lowest mean score among the identified factors, respondents nevertheless agreed that ethnic considerations contribute to women's political marginalisation, reflecting the complex interaction between identity politics and gender in the study area.

Table 2: Analysis of Measures for Improving Women's Participation in Politics in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone

S/N	Statement	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean (X)	Std. Dev.	Remarks
1	Political education and civic awareness programmes will improve women's participation in politics.	210	120	35	25	3.32	0.82	Accepted
2	Financial empowerment and support for female political aspirants will enhance women's political participation.	220	115	35	20	3.37	0.79	Accepted
3	Enforcement of affirmative action and gender quota policies will increase women's political representation.	170	150	45	25	3.19	0.84	Accepted
4	Reduction of electoral violence and political intimidation against women will encourage greater political participation.	220	110	35	25	3.34	0.80	Accepted
5	Eliminating cultural and religious barriers against women's leadership will improve women's participation in politics.	200	120	40	30	3.26	0.84	Accepted
6	Political party support and mentorship programmes for female aspirants will improve women's political participation and leadership opportunities.	205	118	42	25	3.29	0.82	Accepted
Grand Mean						3.30	0.82	

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The findings presented in Table 2 reveal that respondents agreed with all the proposed measures for improving women's participation in politics in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone, as each item recorded a mean score above the acceptance benchmark of 2.50. Financial empowerment and support for female political aspirants recorded the highest mean score (3.37), indicating that respondents consider economic empowerment the most effective strategy for increasing women's political participation. This reflects the high financial demands associated with electoral politics in Nigeria, where campaign financing, nomination fees, and political mobilisation often discourage qualified women from contesting elective offices. Reduction of electoral violence and political intimidation (mean = 3.34) and political education and civic awareness (mean = 3.32) also received high ratings, suggesting that respondents recognise the importance of creating a safer political environment while improving women's knowledge of political processes and leadership opportunities. Political party support and mentorship (mean = 3.29), elimination of cultural and religious barriers (mean = 3.26), and affirmative action and gender quota policies (mean = 3.19) were similarly accepted as important interventions.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that cultural norms and traditional beliefs, religious restrictions, low socio-economic status, patriarchal social structures, stigmatization, electoral violence and political intimidation, inadequate financial resources, ethnic considerations, and political godfatherism are significant factors responsible for gender inequality and the low participation of women in politics in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone. Among these factors, low socio-economic status recorded the highest mean score (3.38), indicating that respondents perceived economic disadvantage as the greatest barrier to women's political participation. This finding suggests that the financial demands associated with political participation, including nomination fees, campaign financing, political mobilisation, and constituency engagement, place women at a considerable disadvantage because many lack adequate access to economic resources. The finding corroborates the studies of Duflo (2012), Osimen et al. (2018), and Umeh et al. (2023), who similarly reported that women limited economic resources significantly reduce their chances of competing successfully in electoral politics. Likewise, the high ratings for patriarchy (mean = 3.33), cultural norms and traditional beliefs (mean = 3.36), electoral violence (mean = 3.37), and political godfatherism (mean = 3.27) demonstrate that women's political exclusion extends beyond economic limitations to include deeply entrenched socio-cultural and institutional barriers. Although ethnic considerations recorded the lowest mean score (3.21), respondents nevertheless acknowledged that ethnic politics continues to influence political support and electoral outcomes within the study area.

These findings strongly support the propositions of Liberal Feminist Theory, which argues that women are disadvantaged not because of any inherent lack of ability but because political, economic, and social institutions have historically been organised in ways that privilege men over women (Wollstonecraft, 1792; de Beauvoir, 1949). The prominence of patriarchy among the identified barriers validates the liberal feminist argument that unequal gender relations continue to shape access to political power and leadership opportunities. Similarly, the high rating accorded to financial barriers reinforces the liberal feminist position that equal political participation cannot be achieved without addressing inequalities in access to economic resources and opportunities. However, the findings also suggest that women's political exclusion in Southern Taraba extends beyond the concerns traditionally emphasised by liberal feminism. The influence of ethnicity, religious beliefs, and political godfatherism demonstrates that women's experiences are shaped by multiple interacting social and political structures, a point frequently emphasised by postcolonial and intersectional feminist scholars. In the context of Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone, where politics is influenced by ethnic diversity, traditional authority, and patronage networks, addressing gender inequality requires not only legal reforms but also broader socio-cultural transformation. Consequently, the findings indicate that improving women's political participation demands integrated interventions that simultaneously address economic empowerment, institutional reforms, cultural attitudes, and political inclusion.

The findings further revealed that political education and civic awareness, financial empowerment and support for female political aspirants, affirmative action and gender quota policies, reduction of electoral violence and political intimidation, elimination of cultural and religious barriers, and political party support and mentorship are important measures for improving women's participation in politics in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone. Financial empowerment recorded the highest mean score (3.37), suggesting that respondents regard economic support as the most practical strategy for increasing women's participation in politics. This finding reflects the widespread perception that financial constraints constitute one of the greatest obstacles to women's electoral success and therefore require deliberate intervention through grants, campaign support, and improved access to economic opportunities. Political

education (mean = 3.32) and the reduction of electoral violence (mean = 3.34) were also highly rated, indicating that respondents recognise the importance of enhancing women's political knowledge while creating a safer environment for political participation. Political party support and mentorship (mean = 3.29) also received strong support, highlighting the need for political parties to create inclusive structures that encourage women's leadership development. Although affirmative action and gender quota policies received the lowest mean score (3.19), respondents still agreed that they constitute an important strategy for increasing women's political representation. The relatively lower rating may reflect public scepticism regarding the implementation of quota policies in Nigeria, where previous affirmative action commitments have often not been fully implemented despite existing policy frameworks.

These findings are consistent with Francovich et al. (2023), Hessami and Lopes da Fonseca (2020), Ette and Akpan-Obong (2022), Adefisoye (2023), and Umeh et al. (2023), all of whom emphasised that women's political participation can be enhanced through political education, economic empowerment, institutional reforms, and safer electoral processes. From the perspective of Liberal Feminist Theory, these findings reinforce the argument that women's underrepresentation is primarily the result of unequal opportunities rather than unequal capabilities. Liberal feminists advocate reforms that guarantee equal access to education, economic resources, political institutions, and leadership opportunities, all of which are reflected in the respondents' preferred interventions. The relatively lower support for affirmative action does not diminish its importance but instead suggests that respondents may place greater confidence in practical measures such as financial empowerment, political education, and institutional support that directly improve women's capacity to compete within existing political structures. For Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone, these findings imply that sustainable improvements in women's political participation will require coordinated efforts by government, political parties, electoral management bodies, civil society organisations, traditional institutions, and community leaders to remove structural barriers and create an enabling environment in which women can participate effectively and equally in political leadership.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that gender inequality remains a major constraint to women's participation in politics in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone. The findings revealed that socio-economic disadvantage, patriarchal social structures, cultural and religious norms, electoral violence, political godfatherism, and other institutional barriers continue to limit women's political participation and representation. The study also established that political education, financial empowerment, affirmative action, reduction of electoral violence, elimination of discriminatory socio-cultural practices, and strengthened political party support and mentorship are critical measures for enhancing women's political participation. Interpreted through the lens of Liberal Feminist Theory, these findings underscore the need for institutional reforms and equal access to political and economic opportunities to promote inclusive governance.

Although the study provides important empirical evidence on women's political participation in the study area, its findings should be interpreted in light of certain limitations, including the use of a descriptive cross-sectional survey design, reliance on self-reported questionnaire data, and the exclusion of male political actors' perspectives. Future studies should employ longitudinal or mixed-method approaches and undertake comparative investigations across the three senatorial zones of Taraba State to provide deeper insights into the dynamics of women's political participation. Notwithstanding these limitations, this study contributes to the existing literature by providing context-specific evidence that can guide policymakers, political parties,

and other stakeholders in designing strategies to promote gender equality and strengthen women's participation in politics in Southern Taraba Senatorial Zone.

- i. Taraba State Government, in collaboration with relevant development partners and financial institutions, should establish dedicated political empowerment and financial support schemes for women, including campaign support funds, entrepreneurship programmes, and access to low-interest credit facilities. This will help address the economic constraints identified as the most significant barrier to women's political participation.
- ii. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), security agencies, and political stakeholders should strengthen electoral security by ensuring adequate protection for female candidates and enforcing sanctions against electoral violence, intimidation, and harassment during electioneering campaigns. This will encourage greater participation of women in the political process.
- iii. Political parties should institutionalise transparent internal nomination processes, establish mentorship programmes for female aspirants, and reserve leadership positions for qualified women within party structures to improve women's access to political opportunities and leadership development.
- iv. The Taraba State Ministry of Women Affairs, civil society organisations, and community-based organisations should intensify political education, leadership training, and civic awareness programmes to enhance women's political knowledge, leadership skills, and confidence to contest elective offices.
- v. Traditional rulers, religious leaders, and community leaders should collaborate with government and civil society organisations to challenge patriarchal norms, harmful cultural practices, and discriminatory religious interpretations that restrict women's participation in politics, while promoting positive attitudes towards women's leadership.
- vi. The National Assembly, Taraba State House of Assembly, and relevant government agencies should strengthen the implementation of affirmative action and gender inclusion policies by developing effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms that encourage increased representation of women in elective and appointive political offices.

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