GENDER INEQUALITY AND WOMEN'S INCLUSIVENESS IN POLITICS: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE 2024 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION IN ADAMAWA STATE

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ABSTRACT
The study examines gender inequality and women's inclusiveness in politics in 2024 local government election in Adamawa State. Despite global strides in promoting women's political inclusiveness, research consistently demonstrates that women often remain on the periphery of politics, with low participation in government structures and the democratic process, particularly developing countries. The study adopts liberal feminist theory. The study employs descriptive research design to examine gender inequality and women's inclusiveness in politics during the 2024 local government elections in Adamawa State. Purposive sampling techniques was used. Data collected were analysed using chi-square facilitated by SPSS. The study discovered that there is high rate of women participation and inclusion in 2024 local government election in Adamawa State. The study recommends that state and local government should continue to expand and create awareness programmes that promote gender equality and women participation in politics.

Introduction

Women's participation in politics varies globally, and discussions on development and governance are incomplete without addressing their role in politics and the democratic process. Despite global strides in promoting women's political empowerment, research consistently demonstrates that women often remain on the periphery of politics, with low participation in government structures and the democratic process, particularly in many parts of the world (Oyekanmi & Orulebaja, 2014; Akeusola, Oyekanmi & Shittu, 2018). This is especially evident in Nigeria, where gender inequality is deeply entrenched, compounded by religious fanaticism and ethnic chauvinism, which exacerbate governance challenges.

Historically, Nigerian women have been active in politics, even before the colonial era.

Denzer (1994) and Mba (1982) highlight those women organized and resisted forms of oppression affecting their economic, socio-cultural, and political domains during both the colonial and post-independence periods. Over the last two decades, there has been global progress in women's political representation, with Africa experiencing some of the fastest growth worldwide. However, Nigeria lags behind its African counterparts in this regard. Since the return to democratic governance in 1999, Nigeria has held seven general elections, yet women's political representation remains minimal. For instance, during the 2023 general elections, only three of the 92 women who contested for Senate seats were elected, and just 15 of the 286 women who vied for seats in the House of Representatives won, highlighting Nigeria's failure to implement treaties and legislation aimed at ensuring women's political inclusion (Premium Times, 2023).

In contrast, the 2024 local government elections in Adamawa State witnessed a remarkable shift. For the first time, women occupied all 21 vice-chairperson positions across the state's local government areas. This development marks a significant milestone for women's political representation in Nigeria, particularly at the grassroots level, where inclusiveness often remains low. Such progress demonstrates the potential for greater women's participation and reflects the growing role of women in socio-economic and political activities.

Scholars such as Ibeanu (2009) identify critical socio-economic and cultural reforms that could enhance women's political status in Nigeria. These include women's increasing visibility and voice in public and professional domains, the gradual erosion of cultural barriers to women's involvement in public affairs, and the strengthening of activist women's organizations advocating for greater political participation. Additionally, the economic empowerment of women has contributed to shifting traditional roles and challenging gender stereotypes.

Despite these advances, barriers to women's full participation in Nigerian politics persist. Factors such as entrenched socio-cultural norms, structural inequalities, and limited access to resources hinder their inclusion in decision-making processes. While there are no constitutional restrictions on women's political participation, their representation remains far from achieving gender parity. Political enfranchisement, though legally guaranteed, requires a critical mass of women in leadership to have a substantial impact on governance and democracy.

Against this backdrop, this study assesses the implications of gender inequality and women's inclusiveness in politics, focusing on the 2024 local government elections in Adamawa State. By examining the factors that facilitated women's success in securing vice-chairperson positions, the study explores opportunities for replicating such progress at other levels of governance. Ultimately, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on sustainable democracy by highlighting the importance of women's active participation in Nigeria's political landscape.

Literature Review

Conceptualisation

The Concept of Gender

Gender encompasses the diverse characteristics that define and differentiate masculinity and femininity. These characteristics may involve biological sex (male, female, or intersex variations), social structures related to sex (such as gender roles), or individual gender identity, depending on the perspective. Historically, gender was understood differently than it is today. In ancient times, the term was primarily associated with grammar, rather than the fluid cultural construct that emerged in the humanities and social sciences during the 1950s and 1960s. Modern interpretations recognize gender as a social construct that evolves with cultural and temporal contexts.

In contemporary discourse, gender represents the social attributes, relationships, and roles associated with being male or female. These attributes are shaped by socialization processes and are adaptable to time, context, and cultural norms. Gender norms dictate acceptable and valued behaviours for men and women within specific settings. For example, in many societies, men and women have unequal access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making powers, as well as differing roles and responsibilities. Thus, gender operates within a broader socio-cultural framework, intersecting with variables such as age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, race, and class.

Historically, gender stereotypes have depicted women as the "weaker sex," framing them as primarily concerned with fashion, beauty, and domestic responsibilities. Awajiusuk (2015) notes that such stereotypes often portray women as less capable of profound thought and leadership. From childhood, female children are socialized to see themselves as subordinate to males, with expectations centred on caregiving and child-rearing. In contrast, male children are groomed for leadership roles from an early age.

These entrenched norms create significant barriers for women who seek to participate in politics, as their involvement often challenges deeply rooted cultural expectations. Women's political participation not only contests these traditional norms but also highlights systemic inequalities in access to leadership opportunities and decision-making roles. Despite these challenges, women's engagement in politics is crucial for achieving gender equality and fostering inclusive governance.

The 2024 local government elections in Adamawa State provide an illustrative example of gender inclusiveness in politics. For the first time in the state's history, women occupied all 21 vice-chairperson positions across local governments. This remarkable development underscores the potential for breaking cultural and structural barriers that have traditionally hindered women's political representation. It also demonstrates the capacity of gender-inclusive policies and practices to create equitable opportunities for women in leadership.

By critically examining the concept of gender, this study seeks to understand how socially constructed roles and stereotypes perpetuate gender inequality and limit women's participation in politics. Furthermore, it explores how transformative changes, as witnessed in the 2024 elections in Adamawa State, can challenge these norms and advance sustainable democracy through the active inclusion of women in governance structures.

The Concept of Women's Participation

Women are central to the development and sustenance of families and communities, serving as the primary caretakers and protectors of society's social, cultural, and fundamental values. Omoruyi et al. (2008) emphasize that the full development of any community is unattainable without women's active and effective participation. Despite their indispensable contributions to the political and socio-economic growth of democratic states, women in Nigeria have yet to achieve equality in politics and national life.

The struggle for gender parity in politics has been longstanding. Fasugba (2000) observes that since women became aware of their rights, they have made significant strides in competing with men across various domains of human endeavour. Today, women are actively engaged in professions and activities traditionally dominated by men. However, the political sphere remains fraught with challenges for Nigerian women. Since the First Republic, they have faced systemic and cultural barriers that hinder their full participation in politics. Nonetheless, the return to democracy has provided a more promising platform for women's political engagement. This democratic dispensation has seen more women in elected and appointed government positions than any other period in Nigeria's political history, marking a significant step toward inclusiveness.

Research highlights the positive societal impacts of women's political participation. For instance, the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2017) reports that women's involvement in governance can reduce inequalities, foster cross-party and cross-ethnic collaboration (Markham, 2013), and prioritize social issues such as education, healthcare, parental leave, and retirement benefits. Burns, Schlozman, and Verba (2001) further argue that women's presence in decision-making roles influences their communities positively, boosting female voter turnout, encouraging greater political participation among women, and enhancing the responsiveness of public services to women's needs.

Despite these benefits, women in Nigeria continue to face unequal treatment in politics compared to men. Successive Nigerian governments—both democratic and military—have acknowledged this disparity but have done little to address it substantively. However, there is a growing consensus among political commentators that women must be more actively involved in governance to promote inclusivity and sustainable development.

The 2024 local government elections in Adamawa State represent a groundbreaking moment for women's political participation in Nigeria. For the first time, all 21 local

government vice-chairperson positions were occupied by women, signalling a significant shift in gender inclusiveness in the region's political landscape. This development highlights the importance of deliberate efforts to empower women and integrate them into governance structures.

This study examines the nexus between gender inequality and women's inclusiveness in politics, using the 2024 local government elections in Adamawa State as a case study. It explores the barriers women face in participating in politics and evaluates the opportunities created by their increased representation. By addressing these issues, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on gender equality and its implications for women inclusiveness in politics in Adamawa State.

The Concept of Elections

Elections are a cornerstone of democratic governance, especially in representative democracies. Ajayi (2015) emphasizes that elections are crucial to the survival and proper functioning of democracy, as they allow citizens to exercise their freedom in choosing representatives or leaders in government. This process is essential for establishing democratic institutions and fostering citizen participation in governance. Since direct democracy is no longer feasible in the modern era, representative democracy relies heavily on elections to function effectively. Without elections, democracy cannot be institutionalized or sustained.

The significance of elections to the democratic process implies that any issues surrounding the electoral process directly impact the stability and credibility of democratic institutions (Nnadozie, 2007). A robust electoral process is integral to strengthening democracy, ensuring the inclusion of diverse societal needs, and offering a platform for different viewpoints to be represented in policymaking. Jinadu (1995) further notes that the electoral process legitimizes political establishments, enabling them to implement policies and consolidate public trust in governance.

The electoral process encompasses a series of interconnected activities. These include the announcement of transition programs, the appointment of electoral managers, election scheduling, voter registration, voter education, voting, election monitoring and observation, security arrangements, the announcement of results, and the resolution of disputes arising from electoral conduct. Each of these steps is critical to ensuring the transparency, fairness, and inclusiveness of the electoral process.

Gender inclusiveness in the electoral process has emerged as a critical area of study, particularly in the context of Nigeria, where women have historically faced significant barriers to political participation. Elections offer a platform for addressing gender inequality by enabling more women to participate as voters, candidates, and decision-makers. However, the structural and cultural constraints embedded in the electoral process often limit women's political engagement and representation.

The 2024 local government elections in Adamawa State represent a notable example of progress in addressing gender inequality in the electoral process. The election was historic, with women occupying all 21 local government vice-chairperson positions for the first time in the state's history. This development underscores the importance of deliberate policies and initiatives aimed at enhancing women's participation in the electoral process and political governance.

This study examines the role of the electoral process in addressing gender inequality and promoting women's inclusiveness in politics, using the 2024 local government elections in Adamawa State as a case study. By analysing the components of the electoral process and their impact on women's political representation, the study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on electoral reforms and gender equality in governance.

Theoretical Framework

Liberal Feminist Theory

The Liberal Feminist Theory (LFT), propounded by Mary Wollstonecraft, serves as the theoretical framework for this study. The theory emphasizes the fundamental principle of equality between men and women, advocating for the removal of artificial barriers that hinder women from participating in any lawful societal activity. It posits that both sexes should have equal access to opportunities, resources, and privileges, and that no gender should be favoured or discriminated against in any realm of life.

LFT underscores those societal cultural standards, religious ideologies, and entrenched political norm have historically disadvantaged women, relegating them to subordinate positions in both public and private spheres. Ako-Nai (2005) argues that the essence of feminism lies in examining and transforming the relationship between men and women, particularly by dismantling the structures that have perpetuated inequality. The theory's core objective is to promote the liberation of women from the societal and institutional constraints that have restricted their full potential.

In the context of Nigeria, the application of LFT is particularly relevant. Nigeria is a patriarchal society where men dominate decision-making processes in politics, governance, and the economy. This patriarchal system often rests on the erroneous assumption that women are inherently less capable, leading to systemic exclusion from the public sphere and limiting their participation in political and electoral processes. This has resulted in women being underrepresented in elected and appointed positions of authority. The study explores how systemic barriers have historically hindered women's participation in politics and governance in the region. The 2024 local government elections in Adamawa State, where women occupied all 21 local government vice-chairperson positions, serve as a significant case study for evaluating the impact of deliberate efforts to address gender inequality.

LFT argues that active participation of women in electoral politics, especially at the gladiatorial level, is vital for achieving gender parity in governance. This theory aligns with the feminist movement's ideals of ensuring equal opportunities and representation for women in all areas of society, including politics. By applying LFT, the study critically examines the structural, cultural, and institutional barriers that have traditionally impeded women's political participation in Adamawa State. Furthermore, it evaluates how the 2024 elections have contributed to the removal of these barriers and advanced the cause of gender inclusiveness in the political landscape.

Ultimately, this theoretical framework supports the idea that achieving gender equality in politics requires proactive measures to eliminate discriminatory practices, ensure equitable access to political opportunities, and foster a level playing field for all genders. The study, guided by the principles of LFT, seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on gender inclusiveness and the strategies necessary to overcome entrenched barriers to women's political participation.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive research design to examine gender inequality and women's inclusiveness in politics during the 2024 local government elections in Adamawa State.

Population of the Study

The study focuses specifically on women in Adamawa State as the target population.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

A purposive sampling technique is employed to assess gender inequality and women's inclusiveness in the 2024 local government elections in Adamawa State. A total of 200 respondents were selected from three local government areas: Yola North, Michika, and Demsa. These respondents represent a diverse group of women varying in occupations, educational backgrounds, political affiliations, ethnicities, and religious beliefs.

Method of Data Collection

Primary data was gathered using structured questionnaires, which were distributed specifically to the selected respondents. The questionnaires were designed to address issues related to gender inequality and women's political participation in the context of the 2024 elections.

Method of Data Analysis

The collected data was analysed using chi-square analysis, facilitated by SPSS software (version 22). This method was chosen to evaluate the relationships and trends in the data concerning gender inequality and women's political inclusiveness.

Results and Discussion

The analysis in table 1 above reveals that gender inequality in politics in Adamawa State, rate of women participation in the 2024 local government election, cultural or religious factors

that hinder women's involvement in politics in Adamawa State, political parties support for women's participation is significant at 5% same level ($p<0.05$) with chi-square value of 113.929, 163.716, 53.149 and 124.851.

This implies that gender inequality in politics in Adamawa State, rate of women participation in the 2024 local government election, cultural or religious factors that hinder women's involvement in politics in Adamawa State, political parties support for women's participation have positive impact on gender equality and women inclusiveness in 2024 local government election in Adamawa State.

Table 1: Perceptions of Gender Inequality in Politics in 2024 local government election

Variables	Chi-Square Value	DF	P-Value
Do you believe there is gender inequality in politics in Adamawa State?	113.929[a]	4	.000*
How would you rate the level of women's participation in the 2024 Local Government Election?	163.716[a]	4	.000*
Do you think cultural or religious factors hinder women's involvement in politics in Adamawa State?	53.149[a]	4	.000*
In your opinion, how do political parties support women's participation in local elections?	124.851[a]	4	.000*

Source: Computed result, 2024

* = Significant at 5%

The analysis in table 2 above shows that there is no record of gender discrimination during the 2024 local government election in Adamawa State and religious beliefs are the major barriers to women's participation in politics in Adamawa State is significant at 5% same level ($p<0.05$) with chi-square value of 65.348 and 115.348. This implies that gender discrimination during local government elections and religious beliefs is having significant impact on gender inequality and women inclusiveness in 2024 local government election in Adamawa State.

Table 2: Barriers to Women's Political Participation

Variables	Chi-Square Value	DF	P-Value
Have you witnessed or heard of any cases of gender discrimination during the 2024 Local Government Election?	65.348[a]	4	.000*
Cultural and religious beliefs are the major barriers to women's participation in politics in Adamawa State	115.348[a]	4	.000*

Source: Computed result, 2024

* = Significant at 5%

The analysis in table 3 above indicates that the populaces are aware of initiatives to promote women's inclusiveness in the 2024 local government election, the initiatives were effective and increase political education and financial support is significant at 5% same level ($p<0.05$) with chi-square value of 77.121, 110.525 and 110.028. This implies that the created initiatives are very effective in 2024 local government election in Adamawa State.

Table 3: Inclusiveness Strategies and Effectiveness

Variables	Chi-Square Value	DF	P-Value
Are you aware of any initiatives to promote women's inclusiveness in the 2024 Local Government Election?	77.121[a]	4	.000*
Do you think these initiatives were effective?	110.525[a]	4	.000*
Increased political education, financial support for female candidates, policy enforcement on gender quotas and community sensitization programs enhancing women's inclusiveness in politics	110.028[a]	4	.000*

Source: Computed result, 2024

* = Significant at 5%

Findings

The study identified the following as its key findings:

i. There is high rate of women participation in participation and inclusion in 2024 local government elections in Adamawa State

ii. Cultural and religious beliefs are the major barriers to women participation in politics in Adamawa State.

iii. There was massive voters' political education towards the buildup of 2024 local government election in Adamawa State

Conclusion

In conclusion, gender inequality and women's inclusiveness in politics remain significant challenges in Adamawa State despite tremendous improvement in 2024 local government election in the state. Despite the historical marginalization of women in political spheres, there is growing awareness of their underrepresentation in public life. For many women, political involvement is seen as a means to uplift other women, with a strong sense of duty driving their participation and success in securing public office. However, the potential of women to lead and succeed in politics is often hindered by a range of internal and external barriers. These include patriarchal structures, societal and cultural stereotypes, challenges in balancing family and career responsibilities, and limited networking opportunities. Such barriers continue to restrict women's effectiveness as leaders, despite their proven capabilities in both the public and private sectors. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to dismantle these obstacles and create an environment where women can fully participate and excel in political life.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

i. Given the high rate of women's participation in the 2024 local government elections, it is essential for state and local government to continue expanding and creating awareness programs that promote gender equality and women participation in politics.

ii. To effectively address the cultural and religious beliefs that act as significant barriers to women's participation, it is crucial for state and local government to involve community and religious leaders in sensitization programs to give women chance to participate in governance

iii. Special focus should be placed state and local government on training and mentoring women to increase their political awareness and equip them with the necessary skills to run for office.

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