

Socio-economic Factors associated with Gender Gaps in politics in the Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State

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Submitted - August 2, 2025

Final Revision – October 10, 2025

Accepted - October 11, 2025

Abstract

The domination of women by men in political positions and offices undermines the tenets of democracy by posing a serious threat to the assertion and belief of inclusivity of all genders. This paper aims to examine factors associated with the gender gap in politics in the Southern Senatorial district of Taraba state. The paper utilized a sequential mixed-method, descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. The sample size was 384 out of 660,220 men and women of voting age. The study respondents were made up of electoral officers, party officials, and party members. A validated structured questionnaire and key informant interview (KII) were used for data collection. Results were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation, and thematic analysis of KII, and the mean score was set at 2.50. The study's findings revealed that socio-cultural factors, religion mean value (4.41), culture, customs, norms, and traditions (4.39), patriarchal party structure (3.75), electoral violence and threat (3.83), and lack of women's interests (4.41) are responsible for gender gaps in politics. The researcher recommends that the government should make a law that certain elective positions be reserved exclusively for women at all levels, be it federal, state, and local government areas.

Keywords: Gender, Gender inequality, Gender gap, Elective politics, Political participation

Introduction

Gender bias in the political arena has been an issue of great concern over the years in Nigeria, largely because male political actors dominated the political landscape while women were relegated to the background. According to Lijphart (1997), the gender gap in politics refers to the under-representation of women in political offices, leadership roles, and

influence on policy compared to men. These gaps are caused by structural and cultural barriers, political party dynamics, electoral system, practical barriers, etc. In the view of Manza and Brooks (1998), gender gap in politics is the difference in the way men and women participate in politics, often reflecting varying political preferences and priorities between genders. It is also the disparities and

differences in opportunities, resources, and treatment between men and women in various aspects of political leadership.

The national statistics from 2011-2023 provide evidence of the gender gap in politics, which shows that in 2011, women occupied only 6.9% each of the Houses of Senate and Representatives. In Taraba state, no woman has ever become a governor. Women only made up 6.4% of the State House of Assembly, 3.6% of the local government chairpersons, and 3.7% of councilors. The data for 2015 and 2023 showed even a lower proportion of women in those offices (Quadri, 2015; International Parliamentary Union, 2018). The above report shows a very poor representation of women in Nigerian political positions, despite the large number of women in the population.

Historically, Nigerian women's involvement and participation in governance started with the reaction during the Aba women's riot of 1929, when the women rejected and protested the appointment of a warrant chief, who was later dethroned and banished. The riot became known in history because women succeeded in achieving their aim (Abah, 2019). According to Akinboye (2004), colonial administration created gender policies, economic interests, and generalized patriarchal values that reinforced and perpetuated inequality that consciously excluded women. In Taraba State, the highest female involvement in politics was in 2011, when the Northern senatorial district election was won by a woman, who was later appointed as the minister for women affairs by the then administration of late president Muhammadu Buhari in 2015.

However, she later became the APC flag bearer in the 2015 general election and lost out to the PDP candidate which might be due to the religious and cultural beliefs that women are subordinate to men.

The discrimination of women in Nigeria's political landscape has a background of colonial history. Before the advent of colonial rule in Nigeria, some women were acknowledged to have played key roles in the traditional political governance of communities (Uchendu, 2006; Akinboye, 2004; Olatunde, 2010). For instance, in the precolonial era, the likes of Daurama "the queen of Daura, " Sarauniya Amina of Zazzau, Iyayun, Queen Kanbasa of Bony, the queen mother (Iya oba), among others, were influential in the traditional governance of their cities (Aina, 2012; Nelson, 2012).

However, their influence was dwindled and truncated as a result of the colonial rule in Nigeria (Lewu, 2005; Omotola, 2007). The colonial masters failed to notice that African women had roles to play in society, and as such, women lost their political and economic status under their administration (Halkin, 2002), and colonialists elevated men over women in their projects like agricultural cultivation, mining, and construction activities used males and excluded females (Fetter, 1979).

Regarding the central senatorial district of Taraba State, only two women had ever won elective positions to the State House of Assembly in 2011 and 2023, respectively, one representing Nguroje constituency and the other, representing Bali 1. While in Southern senatorial district, the highest elective post won by a woman was a councillorship position in Wukari LGA in 2017 and more also, the

results from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), show that from 1999 to date no woman ever won an elective position in the senate, house of representatives, house of assembly and local government chairperson in Taraba south senatorial district (INEC, 2023).

Various factors are found to contribute to gender gaps in Southern Taraba State and Nigeria in general. Apart from financial constraints identified by Ishaya and Emmanuel (2025), the gender gap in politics could be influenced by cultural, social, economic, and institutional factors, which lead to gender inequality and discrimination. Religion ensures that a significant majority of women were excluded from economic and political activities, including voting and running for office (Luka, 2011). Most Muslim-majority states in northern Nigeria observe "purdah," which involves keeping women from public visibility. In purdah, women must always have a male companion with them when they are out in public and are not permitted to leave their homes without their husbands' permission. Further restricting the flexibility of attire for women under purdah is the requirement for Muslim women to cover their faces in public.

According to Agbalajobi (2010), the culture of many societies is based on subjugating women to men and undermining their self-esteem. Women are typically associated with domesticity, and according to Abiola in Lanre (2003), gender inequality remains pervasive in many dimensions of life, and the nature and extent of the discrimination vary considerably across countries and regions.

In Nigeria, women are often discriminated against, and most domestic chores, such as cooking, sweeping, fetching water, and firewood, are exclusively left for women. Ihiomodu (1995) similarly observed that women were relegated to the domestic sphere and were not rewarded or valued for their services. In line with this, Ogwu (1992) observed that gender differences are created and sustained by society through its traditional customs, conventions, norms, and regulations. Anya (2003) explains that the greatest danger to the practice of gender discrimination in politics is the internalization of these belief systems, which make women see politics as something out of their domain. He further states that society sees women who go into politics as rebels and prostitutes, and this attitude deters them from participating in politics.

Political violence is another element that lowers women's political participation in Nigeria and engenders the gender gaps in politics. This is due to the involvement of thugs before, during, and after elections (Kolawale et al, 2012) and the ensuing insecurity, which involves the loss of lives and property, making politics generally out of consideration for most women. Badmus (2006), notes that "male politicians even at the party level believe in political thuggery, elimination of political opponents by any means, rigging, intimidation, and other clandestine midnight meetings which hold at secret locations thereby making it impossible for women to be participating fully". In Nigerian politics, the notion of "winners take it all" has prompted "do or die" affairs in election. Some political elites

(mostly men) employ violence to suppress political opposition. It is also common knowledge that crimes such as bullying, kidnapping, killing, and thuggery are rampant in political seasons. That is why Odeh (2003) described Nigerian politics as "pure madness". Therefore, politics have often been described as a game for the strong-hearted, where women do not fit in easily, and these could hinder women from participating in politics.

Furthermore, political parties are pivotal in the recruitment of candidates, but when women join, they are often assigned designated roles that do not convey power or require leadership skills. As Pogson (2012) observed, women are often pushed to certain positions that are, practically and strategically, redundant. For example, the two dominant parties allocate a single leadership role for women, which is the "woman leader" position. Even as the parties make claims to gender inclusivity, this seems to be the highest position that women can aspire to in the party hierarchy, as such women are still primarily on the periphery of political parties. This study, therefore, sought to answer the research question: What are the socio-cultural factors associated with gender gaps in politics in the Southern Senatorial district of Taraba State?

Methodology

Research Design: The study utilized the sequential mixed method approach. In this approach, the researcher obtained qualitative data in the first stage, analyzed the outcomes, and then used the outcomes to plan or construct the second quantitative stage (Cresswell, 2014). Rationale for using mixed methods is that

it offers multiple benefits such as a logical foundation, flexibility in methodology and a deeper understanding of small cases (Maxwell, 2016) and also to create more accurate and nuanced conclusions by using the results from one method, either qualitative or quantitative, to guide or influence the application of the other method either qualitative or quantitative method (Plano Clark, & Ivankova, 2016).

Population for the Study: The study population was 660,220 adults of voting age in the five (5) local Government Areas (LGAs): namely Wukari, Ibi, Donga, Takum and Ussa in Taraba South Senatorial district (INEC, 2023).

Sample and Sampling Techniques: For fair representation, the 384 participants were selected across the five (5) Local Government areas that constituted the Southern Senatorial district of Taraba State. The sampling was done in three stages. In the first stage, the researcher used the sample size calculation table by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) to determine the sample size. This table provides a guide on the expected sample based on the population size. Going by this table, a population size of 660,220 or above is recommended to have a sample size of 384 participants. The number was proportionately distributed across three clusters: INEC officials (100), party officials (100), and party members (184). In the second stage, the number of participants was selected using simple random sampling. The third stage, which was the last stage, the researcher purposively selected five (5) participants for the key informant interviews, one

participant from each of the LGAs. These were selected among top politicians with lots of experience in party primaries and general elections, including male politicians (2), women leaders (1), and party officials (2).

Instrument of Data Collection. The instruments used for the collection of data in this study were a questionnaire and the key informant's interview (KII). The structured questionnaire contained 10 items and was divided into two sections. The first section captured the following demographics here: gender, age, marital status, educational qualification, occupation, and length of residency in Southern Taraba. The second section is on socio-cultural factors associated with gender gaps in politics. The items in this section were drawn in Likert's 5-point response format that ranged from strongly agree (1), agree (2), undecided (3), disagree (4), and strongly disagree (5).

The interview instruments used include a structured interview question guide and an audio recorder to document the interview. These three questions were asked: (i) from your own point of view, what socio-cultural factors do you believe influenced the gender gap in politics? (ii) In few words, can you explain how culture, norms, customs and traditions play out in gender gap in politics? (iii) from your own experience in politics, do you believe that electoral violence and threat create fears in the mind of women. All the above questions were open-ended.

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments: The questionnaire was validated by four (4) experts: two (2) from

the Department of Statistics at Federal University Wukari and the other two from the Department of Psychology at Taraba State University, Jalingo. Their corrections enhanced the structure and wording of the questionnaire and KII guide. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient, which yielded a coefficient index of 0.86, indicating how closely a set of items functions together as a group, reflecting greater internal consistency.

Method of Data Collection: The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, including questionnaires and key informant interviews (KII). The participants chosen for the key informant interviews (KII) were informed early to create a conducive environment for the interview. All interviews were conducted in English, tape-recorded, transcribed, and coded for analysis. The interview sessions lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. The outcomes of the key informant interview guide were used to prepare the questionnaire for further data collection.

At the survey stage, a total of 384 copies of the questionnaires were distributed to elicit responses from the participants and were subsequently retrieved by the researcher. The researcher supervised the process of administering and collecting the questionnaires. Five research assistants who were familiar with the study areas were purposively selected, each from the five local government areas in the South Senatorial district of Taraba State.

Data and Statistical Analysis: Responses from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. The mean cut-off mark was set at 2:50 for accepting an item as a common response. The analysis was done using IBM-SPSS version 27. Thematic analysis was utilized for the qualitative data arising from the KII. The data was presented verbatim to preserve the original thoughts of the respondents from interviews while outlining the key points presented by the interviewee.

Interview Results

Social-cultural factors associated with the gender gap in politics in Southern Taraba Senatorial District

Theme 1: Religious factor

One of the major themes obtained from the key informant interview as factors associated with the gender gap in politics is religious factor. The five participants highlighted this factor in their various responses. A 45-year-old female Key Informant in Wukari had this to say:

Religion tends to tie so many women down in this part of the state, where men are dominant or where men are carrying out activities, women are not to be seen there (KII, BI, Age 45, Wukari)

Another informant corroborated this view in his response:

Religion could not allow our women the freedom to partake in politics for the fear of being considered by others as not upholding the tenets of their religion for being submissive and subordinate (K11, B4, Age 40, Ibi)

Theme 2: Culture, norms and traditions

The thematic analysis highlighted that culture, norms, and tradition have influence on the party's candidate selection process, because women were not given a chance to lead men, limit them from expressing their potentials. A 37-year-old male key respondent believed that:

Culture is a kind of inferiority complex in this area and one of our socio-cultural traits here is that male first and Jukun cultural believe that women are under men, and this believe deter so many women from politics which they cannot expressed their potentials and talents (KII, B3, Age 37, Takum)

Another key informant from Ibi validated this view in her response that:

From the look of things, culture sees women as weaker vessels who cannot handle a very serious elective positions when given the opportunity, considering the stress involved and their nature especially married women cannot withstand the midnight meetings and the stress of traveling here and there during campaigns and electioneering process. (KII, B4, Age 45, Ibi)

Them 3: Patriarchal party structure only favors men

The thematic analysis highlighted that some elements of patriarchy were used against women in the party's affairs that affect them in the selection process, for example, giving women less influential positions in the political parties and scheduling late-night meetings. A 50-year-old key informant in Donga had this say:

For Sure, gender disparity in the party's affairs affect women

participation in elective positions greatly because right from the formation of the party structure, women are only considered for the positions of women leader which she is voiceless, and men occupied key positions or offices. So, for crying out loud, how can women compete with men base on the party structure. (KII, B5, Age 36, Donga).

Another informant supported this view in his response:

Odd hours meetings discouraged many married women from joining political parties especially meetings arrange for 12midnight, 1am, 2am, 3am and a responsible woman is not supposed to be seen outside around such hours rather to be at home with the children and also the structure of party's leadership is all men affairs. (KII, BI, Age 45, Wukari).

Theme 4: Electoral violence/threat.

Electoral violence was also highlighted as factors that hinder women's participation. These include thuggery, ballot box snatching, and elimination of opponents deters women from elective positions. A 50-year-old key informant believed that:

Gender gap can be attributed to some indices that can claim someone's life like thuggery, snatching of ballot boxes, etc. women's fear is that politics in this area is deadly and dirty, so who are the people they will hired to go into those polling units to snatched boxes for them, if at all they will joined politics as the way the male counterparts do (KII, B5, Age 36, Donga)

Theme 5: Lack of interest in politics

One of the interview participants is of the view that women generally lack interest in

politics. She attributed this to many factors, such as name-calling, culture, tradition, and poverty. In her words:

From this part of the state, Southern senatorial district mostly under Kwararafa Kingdom, we have a unique culture where women supposed to be seen very submissive to their husband, very decent and stay away from activities that will denigrate them, so for the fear of name calling, midnight meetings, culture, tradition and women lack of interests deters them in politics (KII, B3, Age 37, Takum).

Another informant substantiated the above view in his response:

From my experience of Southern Taraba politics, women are face with some of the following challenge among others, religion, culture, lack of courage among women to contest etc., aligning with the fact that this part of the state is poverty stricken area (KII, B2, Age 50, Ussa).

Quantitative Results

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The data for the study were gathered from respondents with diverse socio-demographic characteristics. the following demographics were represented here: gender consisted of males 53.7% and females 46.3, age, 40-49 years old (30.4%), and 29.3% were 29-39 years old. About a third (30%) of them had secondary education, 33.5% were farmers, 27% were civil/public servants, 22.1% of them had lived in Southern Taraba for 31-40-years, and 24.89% had lived for ≤ 10 years as length of residency.

Socio-cultural factors associated with the gender gap in politics

Qualitative information was built up to form quantitative questions, and the data are presented in Table 1. The participants believe that religion (mean value 4.41+SD 0.64), culture, norms, and traditions (mean

4.39+SD 0.84), patriarchal party's structure (mean 3.75+SD 0.67), electoral violence/threat (mean 3.83+SD 0.87), and lack of women's interest (mean value of 4.41+SD 0.64), were associated with the gender gap in politics.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation responses on socio-cultural factors associated with gender gaps in politics in southern Taraba State

Items	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
Is religion one of the socio-cultural factors associated with the gender gap in politics?	4.41	0.64	Agree
Culture, norms, and tradition have influenced on party's selection process.	4.39	0.84	Agree
The party's structure is too patriarchal and more favorable to men than women.	3.75	0.67	Agree
Electoral violence/threat inhibits women from political elections due to fear of death.	3.83	0.87	Agree
Women's interest in politics (attributed to factors like name-calling, midnight meetings, disrespect to husbands)	4.41	0.64	Agree

also deters women from politics

Discussion

The study identified various socio-cultural factors associated with the gender gap in politics in the study area. Both qualitative and quantitative findings revealed that the religious factor tends to tie down so many women in this area. In many communities, public and political activities are seen as the domain of men, while women are discouraged from participating. This reflects cultural beliefs that place women in a subordinate position to men. Among the Jukun, such religious norms have limited women's involvement in politics. As a result, many women are excluded from political participation due to cultural and religious factors, which continue to contribute to gender gaps in politics in the Southern

Senatorial District of Taraba State. This aligned with the opinion of Luka (2011), that the majority of women were relegated from economic and political activities, including voting and running for offices, due to religious practices.

The qualitative findings further revealed that culture, norms, customs, and traditions also contributed to sidelining women from political elective positions. Women who venture into politics are usually called names, such as prostitute, wayward, loose, rebels, among others. This aligns with the opinion of Anya (2003), where he states that the society sees women who go into politics as rebels and prostitutes, this attitude deters women from participating in politics. The quantitative findings corroborate the

above findings and agree with the opinion of Agbalajobi (2010), that the cultures of many societies are based by subjugating women to men and undermining their self-esteem.

The qualitative and quantitative findings also suggest that electoral violence, such as snatching of ballot boxes and armed thuggery, is another factor that inhibits women in politics. This violence often leads to injuries, loss of lives and properties, aligning with the opinion of Odeh (2003), who described Nigerian politics as “pure madness”. The pressure and violence associated with political elites (mostly men) has remained the most paramount issue, which inflicts fear and also discourages most women from being active in politics, for fear of not being killed. Badmus (2006) similarly noted that male politicians, even at the party level, believe in political thuggery, elimination of political opponents by any means, rigging, intimidation, and other clandestine midnight meetings, which are held at secret locations, thereby making it impossible for women to participate fully

The qualitative and quantitative findings further revealed that patriarchal party structure is another reason for the gender gap in politics in the sense that men dominated the party structure and key positions, while women are only left with the women's leader position. During the selection process, men usually emerge as flag bearers of the party because the party's structure favors male candidates over female. In the history of Southern Taraba, only a councillorship position has ever been won by a woman since the democratic transition in 1999 to date. This finding corroborates Pogoson's (2012)

view that women are often pushed to certain positions that are, practically and strategically, redundant.

Additional findings from both qualitative and quantitative research suggest that women's lack of interest, shaped by culture, tradition, religion, etc., is a factor of the gender gap in politics. This is because women in politics are viewed by society as disrespectful, wayward, and loose. As a result, most women prefer to keep their marriages by being submissive rather than to go into politics and become the talk of society disrespectfully. Moreover, women are often saddled with the responsibilities of house chores, childbearing, and upbringing, which deters them from active politics.

Conclusion

The gender gap in political participation in the Southern Taraba Senatorial District is largely influenced by deep-rooted socio-cultural factors, as demonstrated by both quantitative and qualitative findings. These factors include religious and cultural beliefs, customs and traditions, patriarchal party structures, electoral violence and intimidation, and generally low political interest among women. Together, they create strong barriers that limit women's access to the resources, networks, and opportunities required for meaningful political engagement. As a result, many women face challenges in carrying out political campaigns, gaining party support, and participating actively in political activities. In addition, societal expectations and domestic responsibilities place further constraints on women's time, mobility, and visibility, reinforcing

their underrepresentation in the political space.

Recommendations

In view of the above findings, the researcher gives the following recommendations:

1. There should be an enactment from the federal government that certain elective positions be reserved exclusively for women at both the state and local government area levels.
2. Political activists should create awareness in favor of women and assurance of not only a fair playing ground but also protection for womenfolk who are assumed to be weak.
3. The government should reform political finance rules and the role of money in elections.

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