

**SPATIAL ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN ABEOKUTA
SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, OGUN STATE 2023 GENERAL ELECTION
NIGERIA**

AJIBOYE Oloruntobiloba Temitayo¹

ABSTRACT

Women's participation in politics remains disproportionately low relative to their population strength in Nigeria, despite constitutional guarantees of equal rights and numerous affirmative action frameworks. This study examined the spatial pattern of women's participation in politics in Ogun State, Nigeria, using the 2023 general election in Abeokuta South Local Government Area as a case study. The study specifically examined the level of women's participation as voters, contestants, party executives, and campaigners across the fifteen (15) wards of Abeokuta South; assessed the spatial (ward-level) variation in this participation; identified the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors constraining women's political participation; and examined the relationship between these constraints and the observed level of participation. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, anchored on the Liberal Feminist Theory and the Political Opportunity Structure framework. A sample of 380 respondents was drawn from the estimated adult population of Abeokuta. Findings revealed that women's political participation in Abeokuta South was heavily skewed towards voting (74.5%) and considerably lower in contestation for elective office (5.8%). The study concludes that women's political participation in Abeokuta South is not spatially uniform, but is shaped by the differential distribution of political opportunity structures, party infrastructure, and resources across wards. It recommends, among others, deliberate ward-level affirmative action in candidate nomination, targeted financial empowerment schemes for women aspirants in peripheral wards, and stronger enforcement of INEC and political party guidelines on gender inclusion.

Keywords: Women's Political Participation, Spatial Analysis, Gender and Politics, Electoral Behaviour

¹ Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo

INTRODUCTION

Political participation is one of the fundamental indicators of democratic consolidation and inclusive governance in any society. It refers to the range of activities through which citizens seek to influence the selection of political leaders and the policies they pursue, including voting, contesting for elective office, campaigning, holding party positions, and engaging in political discourse. In democratic theory, the extent to which all segments of the population, including women, are able to participate meaningfully in politics is regarded as a critical measure of the health and inclusiveness of that democracy.

Globally, women constitute slightly above half of the population, yet their representation in political leadership positions remains disproportionately low compared to men. The United Nations, through several conventions including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995, has consistently advocated for a minimum of thirty-five percent (35%) affirmative action for women in political and public life. In Nigeria, this aspiration is further echoed in the National Gender Policy (2006, revised 2021), which recommends a thirty-five percent affirmative action threshold for women in appointive and elective positions. Despite these frameworks, empirical evidence shows that Nigeria consistently ranks among the lowest globally in terms of women's representation in elective political offices.

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria, spanning the presidential, gubernatorial, National Assembly, and State Houses of Assembly elections, once again brought to the fore the marginal representation of women in politics. According to reports from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and various election observation groups, women accounted for less than fifteen percent of total candidates fielded by political parties across the country, and an even smaller percentage of those who eventually won elective seats. Ogun State, like most states in Nigeria, reflected this national trend, with women poorly represented among the successful candidates for the House of Assembly and National Assembly seats within the state.

However, political participation is not evenly distributed across geographical space even within a single local government area. Variations exist across wards, communities, and polling units, shaped by differences in socio-economic status, urbanisation, literacy levels, party structures, traditional authority, and religious orientation. This suggests that women's political participation should not be studied only in aggregate terms but also spatially, that is, examining how participation varies from one locality to another within the same political and administrative unit. Spatial analysis, borrowed from geography and increasingly applied in political and social sciences, allows researchers to map and compare patterns of a phenomenon (in this case, women's political participation) across defined spatial units such as wards.

Abeokuta South Local Government Area, one of the twenty Local Government Areas in Ogun State and home to the Ogun State capital, comprises fifteen (15) wards including Ake I, Ake II, Ake III (Adatan/Lantoro), Emere, Ijemo, Itoko, Ijaiye/Idi-Aba, Erunibe/Ijoko/Ilogbo/Oke-Ejigbo, Oke Ijeun, Ago Ijesha/Ijeun-Titun/Ago-Egun, Sodeke/Isale Ijeun I, Sodeke/Isale Ijeun II, Oke-Yeye/Imo/Isabo, Igboire/Itori/Ago-Oba, and Ibara. These wards differ considerably in terms of urbanisation, commercial activity, population density, and proximity to the traditional and administrative centre of Abeokuta. It is against this backdrop that this study interrogates the spatial dimension of women's political participation in the 2023 general election within Abeokuta South Local Government Area, with a view to understanding whether, and to what extent, ward-level differences shape the pattern of women's involvement in politics.

This study is guided by the following research questions: What is the level of women's participation (as voters, contestants, party executives, and campaigners) in the 2023 general election in Abeokuta South Local Government Area? What is the spatial (ward-level) pattern of women's political participation across the fifteen wards of Abeokuta South Local Government Area?

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Concept of Political Participation

Political participation has been defined by various scholars as the range of activities engaged in by citizens with the intention of influencing government decisions and the selection of those who govern. Verba and Nie (1972), in one of the foundational works on the subject, conceived political participation as legal activities by private citizens that are directed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and the actions they take. Contemporary scholars have expanded this definition to include not only conventional forms of participation such as voting and contesting elections, but also unconventional forms such as protests, social media activism, and community mobilisation.

In the Nigerian context, political participation is generally understood to encompass voter registration, actual voting, contesting for party or public office, campaigning for candidates, financial contribution to political causes, and attendance at political rallies and meetings. For the purpose of this study, political participation is operationalised along four dimensions: voting in the 2023 general election, contesting for elective office, holding party executive positions, and involvement in campaign activities.

Concept of Gender and Politics

Gender, as distinct from biological sex, refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. The study of gender and politics examines how these socially constructed roles shape

access to, and participation in, political processes and institutions. Scholars in this field argue that political institutions are not gender-neutral; rather, they often reflect and reinforce existing patriarchal structures that privilege male political actors while marginalising women.

In Nigeria, gender roles rooted in cultural and religious traditions have historically confined women to the domestic sphere, positioning politics as an overwhelmingly male preserve. Although modernisation, education, and legal reforms have gradually challenged this arrangement, the pace of change in women's political representation remains slow relative to the gains recorded in other sectors such as education and the professions.

Concept of Spatial Analysis in Political Studies

Spatial analysis refers to a set of techniques for examining and interpreting the locational or geographical properties of a phenomenon. In political science and electoral studies, spatial analysis is applied to understand how political behaviour, such as voting patterns, party support, or in this case, women's political participation, varies across geographical or administrative units such as states, local governments, wards, or polling units. Spatial analysis in electoral studies typically ranges from sophisticated Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping of election results to simpler, survey-based comparative analysis of

participation indicators across defined spatial units.

For the purpose of this study, spatial analysis is operationalised through a ward-level comparative approach, in which survey-derived indicators of women's political participation are compared across the fifteen wards of Abeokuta South Local Government Area, allowing for the identification of spatial clusters of high and low participation.

Concept of Electoral Behaviour

Electoral behaviour refers to the actions and decisions of the electorate in relation to elections, including the decision to register, to vote, for whom to vote, and the factors that shape these decisions. Electoral behaviour theories help to explain why participation levels differ across social groups and geographical locations, incorporating socio-economic status, party identification, and social network effects as explanatory variables.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on two complementary theories: the Liberal Feminist Theory and the Political Opportunity Structure Theory.

Liberal Feminist Theory

Liberal Feminist Theory, associated with scholars such as Mary Wollstonecraft and later Betty Friedan, holds that gender inequality, including unequal political

participation, arises from legal and structural barriers that deny women equal access to opportunities available to men, rather than from any inherent incapacity on the part of women. The theory advocates for the removal of such structural barriers, including discriminatory laws, unequal access to education, and gatekeeping within political party structures, so that women can compete with men on an equal footing.

Applied to this study, Liberal Feminist Theory provides the lens through which the structural and institutional constraints (such as party gatekeeping and financial barriers) that limit women's political participation across the wards of Abeokuta South are understood, and supports the argument for affirmative interventions that remove these structural barriers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches, to examine the spatial pattern of women's political participation in the 2023 general election in Abeokuta South Local Government Area, Ogun State. The descriptive survey design was considered appropriate because it allows for the systematic collection of data from a sample considered representative of the population, and permits the description, comparison, and analysis of variables (in this case, participation indicators) across the fifteen

wards that constitute the study's spatial units of analysis. A cross-sectional approach was adopted, with data collected at a single point in time (June 2026), referencing the 2023 general election.

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprised all adult male and female residents of voting age (18 years and above) resident in the fifteen wards of Abeokuta South Local Government Area, Ogun State, who were eligible and participated in the 2023 general election. According to the National Population Commission's projected figures and the 2006 census baseline of 250,278 for Abeokuta South, the estimated adult (voting-age) population of the Local Government Area as at 2023 was put at approximately 165,000. However, given the specific focus on women's political participation, particular attention was paid to ensuring adequate representation of women respondents, alongside male respondents whose perceptions of women's participation were also relevant to the study's objectives.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected from the field were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Python. Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores, were used to answer Research Questions 1 and 2 and to present the demographic and ward-level participation

profile of respondents. The Chi-square (χ^2) test of independence was used to test Hypotheses 1 and 2, examining respectively whether voter participation differed significantly between core and peripheral wards, and whether education level was significantly related to contestation for elective office. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test Hypothesis 3, examining the relationship between the composite constraint index and the level of women's political participation. All inferential tests were conducted at the 0.05 level of significance.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents and analyses the data obtained from the 380 copies of the questionnaire administered across the fifteen wards of Abeokuta South Local Government Area, all of which were retrieved and found valid for analysis, representing a 100% response rate. The chapter is organised into five sections: demographic characteristics of respondents, the level of women's political participation, the spatial (ward-level) analysis of participation, the constraints to women's political participation, and the test of hypotheses.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age category	Percentage (%)
18-25	17.9
26-35	25.5
36-45	26.6
46-55	17.9
56 and above	12.1
Total	100.0

Table 1 shows that the largest proportion of respondents, 26.6%, fell within the 36-45 age bracket, followed by 25.5% within the 26-35 bracket. This indicates that the sample was dominated by respondents within the economically and politically active age range, which lends credibility to their responses on political participation.

Table 2: Educational Qualification of Respondents

Educational Level	Percentage (%)
No formal education	5.0
Secondary	28.7

OND/NCE	21.1
HND/BSc	33.7
Postgraduate	11.6
Total	100.0

Contested for elective office	5.8
Held party executive position	9.5
Participated in campaign activities	20

As shown in Table 2, 33.7% of respondents held HND/BSc qualifications, while only 5.0% had no formal education, suggesting a relatively literate sample capable of providing informed responses on political and electoral matters.

Level of Women's Political Participation in the 2023 General Election

This section answers Research Question 1: What is the level of women's participation (as voters, contestants, party executives, and campaigners) in the 2023 general election in Abeokuta South Local Government Area?

Table 3: Overall Level of Women's Political Participation

Participation Indicator	Overall (%)
Voted in 2023 general election	74.5

Table 3 shows that participation was heavily skewed towards voting, with 74.5% of respondents indicating that they voted in the 2023 general election. However, participation dropped sharply at the level of contestation for elective office (5.8%), holding of party executive positions (9.5%), and involvement in campaign activities (20%). This pattern is consistent with what Adebayo (2022) described in the empirical literature as a "participation funnel", in which women's involvement narrows progressively as one moves from the least demanding form of participation (voting) to the most demanding (contesting for office).

Spatial (Ward-Level) Analysis of Women's Political Participation

This section answers Research Question 2: What is the spatial (ward-level) pattern of women's political participation across the fifteen wards of Abeokuta South Local Government Area?

Table 4: Ward-Level Distribution of Women's Political Participation Indicators (%)

Table 4 reveals a clear spatial pattern in women's political participation across the fifteen wards. Oke-Yeye/Imo/Isabo recorded the highest voter participation rate (96.0%), followed by Ake III (Adatan/Lantoro) (88.5%), Ibara (88.0%), and Itoko (88.0%), all of which are core/central wards. In contrast, the lowest voter participation rates were recorded in Erunibe/Ijoko/Ilogbo/Oke-Ejigbo (53.8%), Ago Ijesha/Ijeun-Titun/Ago-Egun (57.7%), and Sodeke/Isale Ijeun II (60.0%), all peripheral wards. A similar, though less pronounced, pattern is observable for campaign participation, where Oke-Yeye/Imo/Isabo (40.0%) and Ibara (28.0%) again lead, while Emere (8.0%) and Erunibe/Ijoko/Ilogbo/Oke-Ejigbo (15.4%) trail behind.

This spatial clustering of higher participation in core/central wards and lower participation in peripheral wards lends preliminary support to the Political Opportunity Structure theory, which predicts that localities with more developed political infrastructure and mobilisation history (typically the core, more urbanised wards closer to the traditional seat of Abeokuta) present a more open opportunity structure for political participation, including for women, than less urbanised, peripheral localities.

Interestingly, contestation for elective office does not follow the exact same spatial pattern as voting; Ake II (16.0%) and

Ibara (8.0%) recorded notably higher contestation rates alongside Ake III and Ake I, suggesting that while voting participation is broadly a core-periphery phenomenon, contestation may be additionally shaped by ward-specific factors such as the presence of established women political actors or party structures domiciled within particular wards.

Constraints to Women's Political Participation

This section answers Research Question 3: What socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors constrain women's political participation in Abeokuta South Local Government Area?

Table 5: Mean Ratings of Constraints to Women's Political Participation (5-Point Likert Scale)

Constraint	Mean (out of 5)	SD
Financial/resource constraints	3.95	0.75
Political party structural bias	3.65	0.86
Cultural/traditional norms	3.56	0.84
Violence and intimidation	3.37	0.95

Religious normative constraint	3.13	0.96
--------------------------------------	------	------

Table 5 shows that financial/resource constraints ranked highest (mean = 3.95), followed by political party structural bias (mean = 3.65) and cultural/traditional norms (mean = 3.56). Violence and intimidation (mean = 3.37) and religious normative constraints (mean = 3.13) were rated comparatively lower, though still above the midpoint of the scale, indicating that they remain relevant but secondary barriers. These findings corroborate Okoye and Chukwuma (2021) and Nwankwo (2019), who similarly identified financial constraints and party gatekeeping structures as the most severe barriers to women's political participation in other parts of Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study demonstrate that women's political participation in Abeokuta South Local Government Area during the 2023 general election was not spatially uniform. Voting, the least demanding form of participation, was relatively high overall but varied significantly between core/central and peripheral wards, a pattern statistically confirmed under Hypothesis One. This lends strong support to the Political Opportunity Structure theory, which explains such variation as a function of the differential distribution of political

infrastructure, mobilisation networks, and resources across space.

The finding that educational attainment alone was not significantly related to contestation for elective office (Hypothesis Two) is particularly instructive. It suggests that improving women's access to education, while necessary, is not sufficient on its own to close the gender gap in political contestation; structural barriers within party systems, identified in this study as the second most severe constraint (mean = 3.65), must be addressed concurrently, in line with the Liberal Feminist theoretical position that structural, not individual-capacity, barriers are the primary obstacle to women's political advancement.

The finding regarding constraints (Hypothesis Three) reveals a nuanced but important insight: constraints to women's participation appear to function more as a contextual, ward-level phenomenon rather than a straightforward individual-level predictor. This reinforces the value of the spatial approach adopted in this study, as it captures a dimension of gender inequality in political participation that a purely individual-level or aggregate state-wide analysis would likely miss. Overall, the findings validate the study's central proposition that women's political participation in Abeokuta South Local Government Area is shaped as much by where a woman resides within the local government as by her individual socio-demographic characteristics.

**CONCLUSION AND
RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that women's political participation in Abeokuta South Local Government Area during the 2023 general election was neither uniformly low nor uniformly distributed across space; rather, it exhibited a distinct spatial pattern in which core/central wards, benefiting from more developed political infrastructure and mobilisation history, recorded significantly higher participation than peripheral wards. This finding validates the applicability of the Political Opportunity Structure theory to the study of women's political participation at the sub-local government level and demonstrates the analytical value of disaggregating political participation data by spatial unit rather than relying solely on aggregate local government, state, or national figures.

The study further concludes that financial constraints and political party structural bias, rather than cultural or religious factors alone, constitute the most pressing barriers to women's fuller political participation in the study area, and that these constraints are experienced as much at the level of the local political environment (ward) as at the level of the individual woman. Addressing the gender gap in political participation in Abeokuta South, and by extension in similar Nigerian local government contexts, therefore requires spatially-targeted rather than purely generic interventions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Political parties operating in Abeokuta South Local Government Area should adopt deliberate, ward-level affirmative action in candidate nomination, with particular attention to peripheral wards such as Erunibe/Ijoko/Ilogbo/Oke-Ejigbo, Ago Ijesha/Ijeun-Titun/Ago-Egun, and Sodeke/Isale Ijeun II, where women's political participation was found to be lowest.
- ii. The Ogun State Ministry of Women Affairs, in collaboration with relevant non-governmental organisations, should design and implement targeted financial empowerment and campaign-financing support schemes specifically for women political aspirants resident in peripheral wards, given that financial constraint emerged as the most severe barrier to participation in this study.
- iii. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Ogun State Independent Electoral Commission (OGSIEC) should intensify targeted voter and civic education programmes in peripheral wards to close the gap in voter

turnout between core and peripheral areas of the Local Government Area.

political violence or intimidation that may deter women's participation.

- iv. Political parties should reform internal candidate nomination structures to reduce the structural and gatekeeping bias identified in this study as the second most severe constraint, including transparent, merit-based delegate selection processes that do not systematically disadvantage women aspirants.
- v. Civil society organisations and relevant government agencies should establish ward-level women's political mentorship and leadership training programmes, particularly in peripheral wards, to bridge the political opportunity structure gap identified between core and peripheral wards.
- vi. Traditional and religious institutions within Abeokuta South should be actively engaged as partners in reorienting socio-cultural and religious normative attitudes that, though rated as secondary constraints in this study, continue to discourage women's fuller political engagement, particularly in more traditional peripheral communities.
- vii. Security agencies should ensure adequate protection for women political aspirants and voters across all wards, with particular attention to any ward-specific patterns of

REFERENCES

- Adebayo, T. O. (2022). Gender dynamics and electoral participation in South-West Nigeria: An analysis of the 2019 general elections. *Nigerian Journal of Political Science*, 14(2), 45–61.
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. (1979). United Nations General Assembly.
- Eisinger, P. K. (1973). The conditions of protest behavior in American cities. *American Political Science Review*, 67(1), 11–28.
- Falana, O. R. (2021). Religion, culture, and women's political participation in South-West Nigeria. *Ife Journal of Gender Studies*, 9(1), 22–38.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1999). Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended).
- Friedan, B. (1963). *The feminine mystique*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Ibrahim, H. M. (2020). Spatial dimensions of women's political participation in Northern Nigeria. *Journal of Northern Nigerian Studies*, 6(3), 88–104.
- Independent National Electoral Commission. (2023). Report on the 2023 general elections. INEC Nigeria.
- National Population Commission. (2010). Population distribution by sex, state, LGAs and senatorial districts: 2006 census priority tables (Vol. 3). National Population Commission, Nigeria.
- Nigeria National Gender Policy. (2021). Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, Abuja (Revised edition).
- Nwankwo, C. F. (2019). Party structures and women's access to elective positions in South-East Nigeria. *African Journal of Gender and Development*, 11(1), 15–29.
- Okoye, N. J., & Chukwuma, I. P. (2021). Determinants of women's political participation in South-East Nigeria. *International Journal of Gender and Politics*, 8(2), 33–50.
- Tarrow, S. (1994). *Power in movement: Social movements, collective action, and politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- United Nations. (1995). Beijing declaration and platform for action. Fourth World Conference on Women.
- Verba, S., & Nie, N. H. (1972). *Participation in America: Political democracy and social equality*. Harper & Row.
- Wollstonecraft, M. (1792). *A vindication of the rights of woman*. J. Johnson.

JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (JPIR)

Yamane, T. (1967). Statistics: An introductory analysis (2nd ed.). Harper and Row.

elections in Nigeria: An evaluation. Nigerian Journal of Electoral Studies, 5(1), 12–27.

Yusuf, A. B., & Bello, S. K. (2022). Women candidates and the 2023 general

Ward	n	Voted (%)	Contested (%)	Party Office (%)	Campaign (%)
Oke-Yeye/Imo/Isabo	25	96	0	8	40
Ake III (Adatan/Lantoro)	26	88.5	7.7	3.8	23.1
Ibara	25	88	8	16	28
Itoko	25	88	4	12	24
Ake I	25	80	8	12	12
Ake II	25	80	16	4	20
Oke Ijeun	25	76	12	8	12
Ijemo	25	76	8	20	16
Igbore/Itori/Ago-Oba	26	73.1	3.8	7.7	19.2
Emere	25	72	0	4	8
Ijaiye/Idi-Aba	26	65.4	3.8	11.5	26.9
Sodeke/Isale Ijeun I	25	64	4	8	16
Sodeke/Isale Ijeun II	25	60	4	12	20

Ago Ijesha/Ijeun-Titun/Ago-Egun	26	57.7	3.8	7.7	19.2
Erunibe/Ijoko/Ilogbo/Oke-Ejigbo	26	53.8	3.8	7.7	15.4

Table 4: Ward-Level Distribution of Women's Political Participation Indicators (%)