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GENDER AND POLITICS IN DELTA STATE: A STUDY OF SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF DELTA STATE (2015-2023)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines gender and politics in Delta State, Nigeria, with particular emphasis on women's political participation, representation and involvement in democratic governance across selected Local Government Areas between 2015 and 2023. The study is premised on the recognition that gender equality and inclusive political participation are fundamental principles of democratic governance, yet women's involvement in political institutions and decision-making processes in Nigeria remains constrained by socio-cultural, economic, institutional and political barriers. The study adopted the Feminist Theory in explaining the concept under review. Simple percentage and chi- square was used to test the hypotheses while 50 sampled respondents completed a structured questionnaire that was used to collect data from respondents. The study finds among others that while general political participation is relatively high, women's participation is weak and mostly limited to voting, Cultural and traditional beliefs and lack of financial resources are identified as the most significant barriers to women's political participation. Political violence, lack of party support, and family responsibilities further compound the challenges. The study recommend among others that Political parties and electoral bodies should implement quotas or reserved seats for women to increase representation in elective and appointive positions. NGOs, women's groups, and government agencies should invest in training, mentorship, and political education programs for aspiring female leaders.

Keywords: Gender, Politics, Women's Political Participation, Political Representation.

INTRODUCTION

The persistent gender imbalance in Nigerian politics has become a pressing social and developmental concern. Despite Nigeria's constitutional provisions for equality (Section 42 of the 1999 Constitution, as amended) and its ratification of international treaties like the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the African Union Protocol on Women's Rights, women's political participation and representation remain abysmally low. Successive national and local elections in Nigeria have

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shown that politics continues to be a male-dominated sphere, where women's voices and interests are systematically marginalized. (Odinkalu,2021)

In Delta State, particularly in Oshimili South and North Local Government Areas, this pattern of exclusion is deeply entrenched. The two LGAs, located in the Anioma-speaking part of Delta State, have a rich socio-cultural heritage, but also strong patriarchal norms that prescribe gender roles and often relegate women to the background of political processes. Although women in these communities play active roles in informal leadership, community mobilization, and civic engagement, their representation in formal political offices remains negligible.

However, there is a paucity of localized, empirical studies that critically examine how politics, as practiced in these LGAs, impacts gender relations and the participation of women. Most existing studies on gender and politics in Nigeria adopt a national or state-wide lens, thereby overlooking the peculiarities of local government areas, where many critical decisions affecting communities are made.

Failure to address these localized gender disparities not only entrenches inequality but also deprives communities of the unique perspectives and contributions that women bring to governance. Without an in-depth understanding of the specific barriers and impacts of politics on gender in Oshimili South and North, interventions aimed at promoting gender equity in politics risk being ineffective or unsustainable.

This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by interrogating the impacts of politics on gender in Oshimili South and North LGAs. It will explore the extent to which political structures, processes, and cultural practices hinder or facilitate gender equity in political participation and representation. By doing so, it aims to provide evidence-based insights for policymakers, civil society organizations, and political actors to create more inclusive political spaces at the local level.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective is to examine the impacts of politics on gender in Oshimili South and North Local Government Areas, (2015 – 2023). While the specific objectives are to:

i. analyze the level of women's political participation in the selected LGAs.
ii. examine socio-cultural and institutional barriers to gender equality in politics.
iii. investigate how political parties and electoral processes affect gender inclusiveness.

Research Questions

i. What is the current level of political participation among men and women in the selected LGAs?
ii. What is the level of socio-cultural and institutional barriers to gender equality in politics?
iii. How do political party structures and electoral processes affect gender inclusiveness?

Conceptual Clarification

Concept of Politics

Politics is a fundamental concept in the study of governance, power, and social relations. It can be broadly defined as the activities, processes, and institutions through which decisions are made and implemented in a society (Lasswell, 1958). In its simplest form, politics addresses the question of "who gets what, when, and how," reflecting the distribution and exercise of power within a community or state.

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Politics is not limited to the formal structures of government; it also encompasses informal practices and interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions. As Heywood (2013) argues, politics is both a process and a practice of conflict resolution and consensus building within a framework of power relations. It is the mechanism through which competing interests are negotiated, public policies are determined, and authority is legitimized.

In the Nigerian context, politics is highly competitive and often shaped by patronage networks, ethnic and religious affiliations, and socio-economic disparities (Oloyede, 2016). The country's political landscape has historically favored male dominance, with women and other marginalized groups underrepresented in political decision-making processes. This is partly because politics in Nigeria tends to reinforce existing power structures and cultural norms that privilege certain groups over others (Okeke-Ihejirika & Franceschet, 2002).

Politics plays a crucial role in shaping resource allocation, development priorities, and community leadership. It is within this space that grassroots democracy is expected to function, giving ordinary citizens a voice in governance (Adogbeji & Isonah, 2025). However, local politics often mirrors the gendered and exclusionary dynamics of national politics, with women facing systemic barriers to full participation.

For this study, politics is conceptualized as both a formal institutional arena and a set of informal practices through which power and resources are contested and distributed, reflecting and reinforcing societal inequalities, particularly along gender lines. Understanding politics as a dynamic and contested process provides a framework for examining how gender norms and relations are constructed, challenged, or sustained in the context of local governance.

Concept of Political Participation

Political participation is a central concept in democratic governance, referring to the various ways through which citizens engage in the political process and influence decision-making (Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978). It embodies the idea of active citizenship and serves as a measure of the inclusiveness and responsiveness of political systems.

Scholars have conceptualized political participation broadly, to include both conventional forms, such as voting, contesting elections, joining political parties, and attending rallies, and unconventional forms, such as protests, petitions, and advocacy campaigns (Adogbeji & Isonah, 2025). In essence, political participation is the voluntary activity of individuals intended to influence public policy or the selection of leaders at local, regional, or national levels (Adogbeji & Iwhiwhu, 2026).

Political participation can also be direct — such as running for office — or indirect, such as supporting a candidate or mobilizing others to vote. The nature and level of political participation are shaped by factors such as education, socio-economic status, political awareness, cultural norms, institutional frameworks, and access to resources (UN Women, 2020).

In the Nigerian context, political participation is highly competitive and often monetized, posing barriers to equitable access. Women, in particular, face challenges in participating fully due to patriarchal norms, limited access to resources, political violence, and exclusionary party structures (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2011; Oloyede, 2016). As such, participation rates among women tend to be higher in voting but much lower in elective and leadership positions, illustrating a significant gender gap.

For this study, political participation is conceptualized as the spectrum of activities

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Volume 12, Number 2, 2026
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through which men and women in Oshimili South and North engage in formal political processes, including voting, campaigning, contesting elections, joining parties, and taking part in political discussions and mobilization efforts. Examining gender differences in these activities helps to uncover how politics either promotes or inhibits inclusivity and equality at the grassroots level

Concept of Gender

Gender is a central concept in the analysis of social relations, power dynamics, and political participation. It refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women (United Nations, 1995). Unlike biological sex — which is based on physical and physiological differences — gender emphasizes cultural and social distinctions, which vary across societies and can change over time (Oakley, 1972).

Scholars have long argued that gender is not merely a reflection of biological differences but a system of meaning imposed by society to maintain certain power relations (Lorber & Farrell, 1991). In many cultures, including Nigeria, gender norms prescribe leadership, authority, and decision-making as male domains, while relegating women to subordinate and supportive roles. This has significant implications for women's access to education, employment, property, and political power.

Feminist theorists argue that gender is a critical determinant of power relations, both within households and in public institutions (Tong, 2009). Patriarchal systems, in particular, institutionalize male dominance, creating structural and cultural barriers that disadvantage women in political, economic, and social life (Walby, 1990). In the political arena, these power relations manifest in discriminatory party practices, exclusionary electoral systems, and violence that discourage women from participating fully in politics.

In Nigeria, gender inequalities are deeply entrenched in both formal and informal political structures. Women are underrepresented in decision-making positions despite being active in voting and grassroots mobilization (Adogbeji & Isonah, 2026). Social expectations often frame political leadership as incompatible with women's roles as mothers and wives, while institutional frameworks fail to adequately promote inclusivity. This makes gender a critical lens through which to examine barriers to political participation and strategies for more equitable governance.

For the purpose of this study, gender is conceptualized as a dynamic social construct that shapes and is shaped by political institutions, cultural practices, and individual agency. By applying this conceptualization, the study explores not only the disparities in political participation but also the underlying societal norms and institutional barriers that sustain gendered power imbalances at the grassroots level.

Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

Women's representation in Nigerian politics remains significantly lower than that of men at all levels of government. As the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2023) notes, women occupy fewer than 7% of seats in Nigeria's National Assembly, lagging behind regional averages in Africa. At the local government level, women's representation is even more limited, with many councils recording no elected female councillors or chairpersons (Oloyede, 2016).

Historically, women's involvement in Nigerian politics was more prominent during the pre-colonial and immediate post-independence eras when women like Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti

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Journal Homepage: www.bwjournalorg

and Margaret Ekpo played influential roles in nationalist struggles and party politics (Akiyode-Afolabi & Arogundade, 2003). However, military rule, entrenched patriarchy, and the monetization of politics have gradually marginalized women, relegating them to symbolic roles within political parties and government.

Studies affirm that women's underrepresentation deprives governance processes of diverse perspectives, particularly on issues affecting children, families, healthcare, and educational areas where women often have firsthand knowledge and expertise (UN Women, 2020b). Despite occasional successes, such as the appointment of women ministers and commissioners, the overall trend suggests that politics in Nigeria perpetuates gender imbalances rather than rectifies them.

Barriers to Women's Political Involvement

A wide range of factors impede women's political participation in Nigeria. Socio-cultural norms rooted in patriarchal ideologies view leadership and politics as the domain of men, relegating women to subordinate, supportive roles within the family and society (Oloyede, 2016). Religious interpretations, particularly in some northern regions, reinforce these norms by discouraging women from public life.

Institutional and structural barriers are equally significant. Political parties often sideline women by assigning them to "women's wings" or peripheral roles without real influence on decision-making. Party nomination processes are rarely transparent and often demand high financial and social capital, which many women lack (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2011). The high cost of elections and the prevalence of patronage politics place women at a disadvantage, as they are less likely to have the resources or networks needed to compete effectively (Okeke-Ihejirika & Franceschet, 2002).

Politics in Nigeria is also characterized by violence, intimidation, and harassment tactics that deter many women from contesting or even voting. Cases of physical attacks, verbal abuse, and defamation against female candidates are well documented (Akiyode-Afolabi & Arogundade, 2003). These barriers cumulatively create an environment that is hostile to women's participation, particularly in competitive electoral contexts.

Political Parties and Gender Inclusivity

Political parties are central to the political process and play a decisive role in shaping who gains access to power. In Nigeria, however, party structures and practices have largely reinforced male dominance. Internal party democracy is weak, with candidate selection often based on informal networks of patronage and loyalty, which marginalize women (Okeke-Ihejirika & Franceschet, 2002).

While some parties have adopted gender policies or quotas, implementation has been inconsistent and largely symbolic. For example, the 35% affirmative action target endorsed in Nigeria's National Gender Policy has not translated into tangible gains in women's representation (Oloyede, 2016). Women are often fielded as "token" candidates in unwinnable constituencies to create an appearance of inclusivity without threatening entrenched male power.

Scholars argue that without genuine reforms within party structures — including transparent candidate selection processes, financial support mechanisms for female aspirants, and mentorship programs — political parties will continue to act as gatekeepers that exclude rather than include women (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2011).

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Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Feminist theory which argues that gender inequalities in society are socially constructed and maintained through institutional, cultural, and interpersonal practices that privilege men over women (Tong, 2009). It posits that politics is not a neutral arena but one that reflects and perpetuates male dominance through laws, norms, and practices. Feminist theorists contend that the exclusion of women from decision-making and leadership roles is a form of structural inequality that undermines democracy and development (Okeke-Ihejirika & Franceschet, 2002).

This theory is particularly relevant to this study because it highlights how political parties, electoral processes, and leadership norms in Nigeria systematically disadvantage women, despite formal guarantees of equality in the Nigerian Constitution (FRN, 1999) and international agreements such as the Beijing Platform for Action (United Nations, 1995). By applying feminist theory, this study explores the ways in which socio-political institutions in Oshimili South and North reproduce gender inequalities and how women challenge these constraints through participation at the grassroots level.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The study employs a qualitative and quantitative (mixed-method) approach using a descriptive survey design. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of politics on gender in Oshimili North and South Local Government Areas. The mixed-method design allows for triangulation of data, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Morgan, 2014). The data were presented and analyzed using simple percentage, frequency distributions, means and chi-square analysis. The purposive sampling techniques was employed to choose the survey respondents. A structured questionnaire was employed as the data gathering tool. There are two section to the questionnaire. The three sections of the instrument correspond to the research questions that were developed for the study. The four-point likert scale was scored as follows: 4 for strongly agree, 3 for agree, 2 for strongly disagreed and 1 for disagreed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 4.1: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	28	56
Female	22	44
Total	**50**	**100**

Source: Research Field Survey, 2026

The data indicates that 56% of the respondents are male, while 44% are female. This suggests that although both genders are well represented in the study, men slightly outnumber women. This gender distribution is important because it reflects, in part, the wider political landscape of Delta State, where men are often more visible in public and political life. The near balance, however, also provides a unique opportunity to capture perspectives from both genders, ensuring that the findings are not overly biased toward one side. It may also indicate that women, despite being fewer in politics, are increasingly engaging in conversations around governance and gender equality.

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Volume 12, Number 2, 2026
International Journal of Management & Social Science Research

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Deakin University, Burwood, Victoria 3125, *Australia*
Journal Homepage: www.bwjournalorg

Table 4.2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–25	12	24
26–35	15	30
36–45	10	20
46–55	8	16
56+	5	10
Total	**50**	**100**

Source: Research Field Survey, 2026

The majority of respondents (30%) fall within the 26–35 age range, followed closely by those aged 18–25 (24%). Together, these two groups make up more than half of the total respondents, demonstrating the dominance of younger and middle-aged individuals in the study. This finding underscores the importance of youth in shaping political participation in Delta State, especially since younger people are often more exposed to education, advocacy campaigns, and social media debates about gender and politics. The relatively smaller percentage of respondents above 46 years may point to lower engagement among older citizens, who may either be disillusioned with politics or more conservative in their views about gender equality. This age spread suggests that political awareness and debates on inclusion are largely driven by younger populations.

Table 4.3: Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	20	40
Married	22	44
Divorced	4	8
Widowed	4	8
Total	**50**	**100**

Source: Research Field Survey, 2026

In terms of marital status, the largest group of respondents is married (44%), followed closely by singles (40%). The presence of a significant number of married respondents suggests that perspectives on gender and politics are likely influenced by family responsibilities, stability, and socio-economic commitments. Married individuals may be more conservative or pragmatic about gender roles, while single respondents—who represent a relatively youthful demographic—may be more open to change and more supportive of women's active involvement in politics. The smaller proportions of divorced (8%) and widowed (8%) participants show that these groups are underrepresented but could bring unique insights into the ways social experiences and vulnerabilities shape political views.

Table 4.4: Educational Qualification

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Primary	3	6
Secondary	8	16
Tertiary	25	50
Postgraduate	10	20
Others	4	8

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Volume 12, Number 2, 2026
International Journal of Management & Social Science Research

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Deakin University, Burwood, Victoria 3125, *Australia*
Journal Homepage: www.bwjournalorg

Total	**50**	**100**

Source: Research Field Survey, 2026

The data reveals that a majority of respondents possess tertiary education (50%), with a further 20% holding postgraduate degrees. This high level of education among participants indicates that the respondents are generally well informed and capable of critically assessing issues of gender and politics. Education has long been identified as a strong predictor of political participation and awareness, and this distribution implies that most respondents are knowledgeable about governance processes. The smaller percentages of respondents with only primary (6%) and secondary (16%) education point to limited representation of less-educated groups, which may reflect structural inequalities in access to education. Nevertheless, the dominance of educated voices highlights a growing trend in Delta State where political discourse is shaped by informed individuals.

Table 4.5: Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Student	12	24
Civil Servant	14	28
Politician	4	8
Trader	10	20
Artisan	5	10
Other	5	10
Total	**50**	**100**

Source: Research Field Survey, 2026

The occupational distribution shows that civil servants (28%) and students (24%) form the largest groups, followed by traders (20%), artisans (10%), and politicians (8%). The relatively high number of civil servants indicates the importance of the public sector in Delta State, where many individuals depend on government employment. Students' high representation suggests that younger voices are strongly involved in shaping the narrative around gender and politics. Interestingly, only 8% of respondents identified as politicians, which reinforces the perception that political office is still reserved for a small elite. The
representation of traders and artisans shows that grassroots economic groups are also engaged, but their political involvement is often constrained by financial and social limitations. This occupational mix demonstrates that the sample captures views from both formal and informal sectors of society.

Table 4.6: Awareness of Gender Equality in Politics

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	42	84
No	8	16
Total	**50**	**100**

Source: Research Field Survey, 2026

The data reveals that 84% of respondents are aware of the concept of gender equality in politics, while only 16% are not. This high level of awareness suggests that conversations around gender inclusivity and equality are widespread in Delta State. It also implies that respondents are not only aware of the concept but are also likely to have encountered discussions through education, advocacy programs, or media. The 16% who are unaware

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Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Deakin University, Burwood, Victoria 3125, *Australia*
Journal Homepage: www.bwjournalorg

could reflect either individuals with limited access to information or those who live in more traditional communities where such conversations are suppressed. Overall, the findings highlight the success of awareness campaigns, but they also suggest the need for deeper sensitization at the grassroots level to ensure inclusivity.

Table 4.7: Equal Opportunities in Politics

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	6	12
Agree	10	20
Undecided	8	16
Disagree	16	32
Strongly Disagree	10	20
Total	**50**	**100**

Source: Research Field Survey, 2026

Responses to this question reveal a strong perception of inequality. More than half of the respondents (52%) either disagree or strongly disagree that men and women have equal opportunities in politics, while only 32% agree or strongly agree. The remaining 16% are undecided, which may indicate ambivalence or lack of firsthand experience with political structures. This pattern reflects the persistent challenges women face in accessing political opportunities in Delta State. The perception of inequality is consistent with broader national realities in Nigeria, where women are underrepresented in elective and appointive positions. It also underscores a mismatch between awareness of gender equality and its actual practice in the political arena.

Table 4.8: Perceived Dominant Gender in Politics

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	36	72
Female	4	8
Both	10	20
Total	**50**	**100**

Source: Research Field Survey, 2026

A vast majority (72%) perceive men as more dominant in politics, while only 8% believe women are dominant. Another 20% feel both genders are equally represented. This finding reinforces the reality that Nigerian politics remains a male-dominated sphere, with women still struggling to occupy positions of influence. The 20% who perceive equal representation may reflect either optimism or isolated observations where women have made strides in certain local contexts. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority demonstrates that gender imbalance is deeply entrenched in political structures and perceptions in Delta State.

Table 4.9: Participation in Political Activities

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	30	60

ISSN: 2840 - 2917
Volume 12, Number 2, 2026
International Journal of Management & Social Science Research

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Deakin University, Burwood, Victoria 3125, *Australia*
Journal Homepage: www.bwjournalorg

No	20	40
Total	**50**	**100**

Source: Research Field Survey, 2026

The data shows that 60% of respondents have participated in political activities, while 40% have not. This indicates a relatively high level of political engagement among the population. However, participation does not necessarily mean holding leadership positions—it may be limited to voting or attending rallies. The 40% who have not participated suggest that political apathy or exclusion remains a challenge. Gender may also influence this participation, as women are often more restricted by cultural or structural barriers compared to men.

Table 10: Capacity of Participation

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	30	60
No	20	40
Total	**50**	**100**

Source: Research Field Survey, 2026

Among those who participated, the majority (50%) did so as voters, which reflects the most accessible form of political participation. A smaller percentage were party members (23.3%), while very few were candidates (6.7%) or political appointees (6.7%). This indicates that while voting is relatively inclusive, leadership and decision-making roles remain highly exclusive and male-dominated. The data suggests that women are most likely represented in the voter category but are significantly absent in candidate and leadership roles. This confirms the limited scope of women's political empowerment in Delta State.

Table 4.11: Women's Participation in Politics

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	12	24
No	20	40
To some extent	18	36
Total	**50**	**100**

Source: Research Field Survey, 2026

The responses reveal that 40% of respondents believe women do not participate actively, while 36% think women participate only "to some extent." Only 24% believe women are active participants. This perception highlights the visible gap in women's involvement in politics, which may be due to barriers such as financial limitations, cultural beliefs, and discrimination. The fact that a significant proportion recognize some level of participation suggests that women are not completely excluded but are not present in meaningful numbers to influence decision-making.

Table 4.12: Rating Women's Political Participation

Rating	Frequency	Percentage (%)

ISSN: 2840 - 2917
Volume 12, Number 2, 2026
International Journal of Management & Social Science Research
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Deakin University, Burwood, Victoria 3125, *Australia*
Journal Homepage: www.bwjournalorg

Very High	3	6
High/Moderate	10	20
Low	22	44
Very Low	15	30
Total	**50**	**100**

Source: Research Survey, 2026

A large majority (74%) rated women's political participation as either low or very low. This reinforces the perception of marginalization, reflecting the structural challenges women face in political systems dominated by men. Only 6% considered it "very high," which may point to isolated success stories or optimistic assessments. The overall finding underscores the persistent gender gap in political participation in Delta State.

Table 4.13: Barriers to Women's Participation

Barrier	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Cultural/Traditional Beliefs	35	70
Lack of Financial Resources	30	60
Political Violence/Intimidation	25	50
Lack of Party Support	20	40
Low Educational Background	15	30
Religious Beliefs	18	36
Family Responsibilities	22	44

Source: Research Survey, 2026

Respondents identified cultural/traditional beliefs (70%) and lack of financial resources (60%) as the most significant barriers to women's participation. Political violence (50%), family responsibilities (44%), and lack of party support (40%) also ranked high. These findings illustrate how both socio-cultural norms and systemic barriers intersect to limit women's opportunities. Cultural restrictions perpetuate stereotypes about women's roles, while financial limitations prevent them from competing with men in campaigns. Political violence, which is common in Nigeria, further discourages women from entering the arena. Overall, the barriers are both social and structural, making women's political inclusion a complex challenge.

Table 4. 14: Discrimination Against Women

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	34	68
No	16	32
Total	**50**	**100**

Source: Research Survey, 2026

The data shows that 68% of respondents have observed discrimination against women in politics. This confirms that exclusion is not only structural but also experiential. Discrimination may manifest in forms such as denial of party tickets, underestimation of women's competence, or outright intimidation. The 32% who reported no discrimination may either have limited exposure or belong to communities where women have gained some level of recognition. Nonetheless, the majority perception underscores that discrimination remains

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a major obstacle.

Table 4.15: Impact of Increasing Women's Participation on Governance

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	15	30
Agree	20	40
Undecided	8	16
Disagree	5	10
Strongly Disagree	2	4
Total	**50**	**100**

Source: Research Survey, 2026

A combined 70% of respondents (Strongly Agree + Agree) believe that increasing women's participation would improve governance. This demonstrates a strong belief in the potential contribution of women to political leadership. Many respondents likely see women as more transparent, accountable, and community-focused leaders. The small minority who disagreed (14%) may represent individuals who hold conservative views about women's roles. Overall, this suggests that there is significant public support for greater inclusion of women in politics.

Table 4.16: Adoption of Party Policies to Encourage Women

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	18	36
Agree	20	40
Undecided	6	12
Disagree	4	8
Strongly Disagree	2	4
Total	**50**	**100**

Source: Research Survey, 2026

The data shows strong support (76%) for the adoption of policies such as quotas or reserved seats for women in politics. This demonstrates that many respondents recognize the structural barriers women face and believe affirmative action is necessary to create a level playing field. The minority who disagreed (12%) may represent those who believe politics should remain competitive without interventions. However, the overwhelming support highlights a societal readiness to embrace reforms that promote gender equality.

Data Analysis

The demographic analysis from table 1-5, reveals a near balance in gender representation, with 56% male and 44% female respondents. This distribution provides a fair basis for analyzing gender perspectives on politics. The age distribution shows that the majority of respondents are between 18–35 years (54%), indicating that the study captures the views of youth and middle-aged groups, who are often the most politically active in Nigeria. In terms of marital status, 44% are married and 40% single, suggesting that both family and individual perspectives are represented.

The educational profile demonstrates a highly literate sample, with 70% having

ISSN: 2840 - 2917
Volume 12, Number 2, 2026
International Journal of Management & Social Science Research
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Deakin University, Burwood, Victoria 3125, *Australia*
Journal Homepage: www.bwjournalorg

tertiary or postgraduate qualifications. This implies that the respondents are well-informed and capable of critically engaging with issues of governance and gender equality. Occupationally, civil servants (28%) and students (24%) dominate the sample, reflecting the influence of government workers and educated youth in shaping political discourse in Delta State.

The demographic analysis shows that the sample is diverse and dominated by young, educated, and politically aware individuals—making it suitable for investigating perceptions of gender and politics.

The results from table 6-8, show that 84% of respondents are aware of gender equality in politics, suggesting that advocacy campaigns and political discourse have gained wide reach. However, when asked about equal opportunities in politics, 52% disagreed that men and women enjoy equal chances. This reveals a clear gap between awareness of equality and its practical realization in Delta State.

When asked about gender dominance in politics, 72% pointed to men as the dominant group, while only 8% identified women. This overwhelming perception reflects the entrenched male dominance in Nigerian politics, consistent with national statistics where women rarely exceed 10% representation in elective offices. Despite high awareness of gender equality, respondents perceive politics as a male-dominated sphere with systemic inequalities preventing women from competing fairly.

The analysis of participation shows that 60% of respondents from Table 9-12, have been involved in political activities, though mainly as voters (50%). Only 6.7% have contested elections or held political appointments, confirming the limited scope of leadership participation. Women's participation is particularly constrained—40% of respondents reported that women are not active in politics, while 36% believed women participate only "to some extent." When asked to rate women's political participation, 74% described it as either "low" or "very low." This aligns with the reality of Delta State politics, where women are largely excluded from leadership roles and relegated to supporting roles in campaigns.

While general political participation is relatively high, women's participation is weak and mostly limited to voting. This highlights the exclusionary nature of the political system.

Cultural and traditional beliefs (70%) and lack of financial resources (60%) from table 13-14 are identified as the most significant barriers to women's political participation. Political violence (50%), lack of party support (40%), and family responsibilities (44%) further compound the challenges. These findings echo wider Nigerian realities, where socio-cultural expectations and economic disadvantages hinder women from engaging fully in politics. In addition, 68% of respondents reported observing discrimination against women in politics. This suggests that beyond structural barriers, women face direct bias and marginalization within political parties and communities.

The barriers are both cultural and structural, creating a hostile environment that discourages women from contesting or sustaining political careers.

The analysis from table 15-16 reveals that 70% of respondents believe women's increased participation would improve governance. This indicates public recognition of women's potential contributions to accountability, inclusiveness, and transparency in leadership. Furthermore, 76% support the adoption of gender-sensitive party policies, such as quotas and reserved seats. This strong support for affirmative action shows that the community acknowledges the need for deliberate strategies to correct historical gender

imbalances. There is widespread societal support for women's empowerment in politics, provided that institutional reforms such as quotas are implemented to create fair opportunities.

The study reveals a clear contradiction between awareness and practice. While most respondents recognize the importance of gender equality and support reforms, women remain underrepresented in political structures due to cultural, financial, and structural barriers. Politics in Delta State is still viewed as male-dominated, with women confined largely to voting roles rather than leadership.

However, the strong support for reforms like quotas suggests that society is open to change. If such reforms are implemented, women's participation could increase, thereby improving governance outcomes in Delta State.

The interpretations across the tables demonstrate that although awareness of gender equality is high, actual participation and representation of women in politics remain very low in Delta State. The political environment is perceived as male-dominated, with cultural, financial, and systemic barriers restricting women's involvement. However, the findings also reveal optimism: most respondents believe women's inclusion will improve governance and support reforms like quotas to enhance participation. This tension between awareness and practice highlights the central challenge of gender and politics in Delta State.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that politics in Oshimili South and North LGAs, as in much of Nigeria, is characterized by gender imbalance, with men dominating political spaces while women's participation remains minimal. Although awareness of gender equality is growing and support for women's inclusion in politics is strong, entrenched socio-cultural norms and structural barriers continue to limit women's opportunities. The findings affirm that cultural beliefs, patriarchal traditions, and financial exclusion are the strongest impediments to women's political involvement. However, there is evidence of a shifting societal mindset, with majority support for reforms such as quotas and affirmative action. Bridging the gap between awareness and practice requires deliberate policy intervention and cultural reorientation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

i. Adopt Gender Quotas: Political parties and electoral bodies should implement quotas or reserved seats for women to increase representation in elective and appointive positions.
ii. Capacity-Building for Women: NGOs, women's groups, and government agencies should invest in training, mentorship, and political education programs for aspiring female leaders.
iii. Financial Support Mechanisms: Establish special funds, grants, or reduced nomination fees to reduce the financial burden on women candidates.

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