

Gender Parity and Gender Legislation in Nigeria: An Assessment of Descriptive Representation in the Kwara State Legislature

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Abstract

Parliament across the world no doubt remained the cornerstone of all modern democracies. It is an avenue for all elected representatives to convene and deliberate on critical governance issues affecting their constituents. However, the composition of who makes up the assembly has called for concern. The primary objective of this study is to assess the extent to which women's representation in the Kwara State House of Assembly during the 8th and 9th Assemblies impacted the promotion of gender-related legislation. The study adopted primary and secondary methods while the research design is qualitative. Primary data were obtained from interviews while legislative records, journals, textbooks, articles and surfing of the internet constitute the secondary data source. The total population for the study was 130 purposively sampled respondents. The research findings revealed that there is a strong nexus between female lawmakers and formulation of gender sensitive laws. It also observed that female potentials are not fully tapped as it obtained some other climes owing to some beliefs and practices held by electorates. The study concludes that female representation is essential for sustaining gender legislative priorities. In lieu of this, the research recommends the promotion of women's political participation through adoption of non-elective seats for female lawmakers, vigorous sensitization to address various forms of myths and misconceptions, capacity building, and institutionalization of gender mainstreaming within legislative processes. The findings reinforce existing theoretical claims that women's presence in political institutions is pivotal to achieving substantive gender equality in policy making.

Keywords: Gender Parity, Political Participation, Legislature, Women's Representation, Gender Legislation.

Introduction

Parliaments stand today as one of the most powerful pillars of modern democracies, serving as assemblies of elected representatives tasked with making critical decisions on matters of governance. Yet, a persistent imbalance is visible when observing the makeup of these legislative bodies, whether through international summits, meetings of the United Nations Security Council, or national parliaments around the world — men overwhelmingly dominate the scene. Despite accounting for half of the global population, women remain notably underrepresented across political structures at all levels. The gender gap in political participation and leadership continues to cast a shadow over democratic processes, highlighting an enduring imbalance in governance. As of January 2022, only 25 countries worldwide had a woman serving as head of state or government, and women held merely 25% of parliamentary seats globally (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2022). These figures underscore not only the slow pace of progress but also the ongoing struggle to achieve meaningful gender parity in political representation.

The growing global concern for women's rights and gender equality arises largely from the persistent disparity between men and women in positions of political authority. As of 2021, only 24% of parliamentary seats across Africa were occupied by women and a figure that falls notably below the global average (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2022). Despite several reforms and international efforts, such as the Beijing World Conference on Women (1995), the adoption of gender quotas, and the implementation of affirmative action policies in various countries, gender disparity remains a significant challenge. Persistent obstacles including religious and cultural norms, gender stereotyping, inadequate access to resources, and limited educational and leadership opportunities that continue to undermine women's political participation.

Nigeria, the most populous Black nation in Africa, reflects similar patterns of gender inequality. Women hold a mere 5.8% of seats in Nigeria's National Assembly, sharply contrasting with Africa's continental average of 24% (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2022). Although measures like the National Gender Policy (2006) and the adoption of gender quotas for political appointments in some Nigerian states have been introduced, these initiatives have yielded minimal progress. Nigerian women in politics still face entrenched cultural biases, socioeconomic barriers, discrimination, and restricted access to education and political resources.

Closing the gender gap in Nigeria's political representation is not only vital for promoting democracy but also for realizing genuine gender parity. Yet, despite electoral reforms, women remain substantially underrepresented. Although women constitute approximately 47.5% of Nigeria's voting-age population, the country ranks 181st out of 193 countries globally for women's representation in parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). This persistent underrepresentation not only signals a profound injustice and violation of women's rights but also represents a missed opportunity to harness the ideas, talents, and leadership potentials critical for Nigeria's broader national development. Since the country's return to democracy in May, 1999, the narrative has been the same even at the subnational level of government. In the 2019 election only 45 women were elected into the entire state legislature in the country. Out of 990 seats in the House of Assembly in the entire Nigeria, 1019 women contested against 9221 male contestants. It is worrisome that only 48 women won with a 4.7% success rate for women. A slightly increased by 3 compared to 2019. However it is still far below proper representation.

In recent years, the political landscape of Kwara State has experienced a sharp decline in women's representation. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, women constitute nearly 50% of the state's total population. Yet, the 2019 general elections painted a troubling picture of gender imbalance: out of 528 individuals who contested for 35 elective positions, only 82 were women. In the governorship race, just two out of 35 candidates were female. Similarly, among the 57 senatorial aspirants, only

seven were women, while in the contest for the Federal House of Representatives, ten women vied for seats out of 83 candidates. The situation was no better at the state level, where only 63 women contested among 353 candidates for the State House of Assembly (INEC, 2019).

Tragically, the final outcome of the elections saw no woman elected to any of the 24 State Assembly seats, the six Federal House of Representatives positions, or the three senatorial seats. The offices of Governor and Deputy Governor were also exclusively occupied by men. This reality stands in stark contradiction to the provisions of Article 3 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which obligates states to take appropriate legislative and other measures to ensure the full development and advancement of women, guaranteeing their enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on equal footing with men.

Underrepresentation of women in Kwara State House of Assembly also has a big impact on the state's capacity to handle some of the most important health issues that concern women and children in the state. Inadequate access to public healthcare services, prevalent malnutrition, maternal and child mortality as well as other reproductive health-related issues have continued to dominate a significant place in the public health sector in Nigeria and Kwara State, not an exception. Malnutrition is prevalent in the entire state although the degree of its existence varies among 16 local government areas. Researches have shown that the trend in malnutrition, maternal and child mortality has not shown significant changes as revealed by the National Demographic and Health Survey NDHS 2003, 2008, 2013, and 2018 reports. The reason behind all of these indices is a pointer to the fact that women are not adequately represented in the state's legislative arm of government.

Following the 2019 general election, a number of groups including but not limited to "Kwara Must Change" a Pro-Democracy Organisation, Gender and Youth Advocacy group as well as Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternatives (WRAPA) expressed concern that no woman had been elected into any of the state's elective position. Their fear was hinged on the premise that gender-sensitive legislation will suffer in the state. And by extension, it was going to hamper the growth of prosperity of the society and family and make it more difficult for the full development of the potential of women in the service of their state and country at large.

This absence of proportional representation not only limits the voices and perspectives of women in governance but also hinders the proper development and implementation of gender-sensitive legislation. The lacuna between the proportion of women in the population and their representation in key political positions raises concern about inclusivity, effectiveness and legitimacy of gender related policies and law. The persistent exclusion of women restricts their ability to influence legislation and advocate

for issues pertinent to their demographic which may include but not limited to healthcare, family issues, education, gender-based violence. Therefore, this research seeks to unravel the impact of this imbalance on policy outcome and propose strategies to enhance female representation at all level of government

Conceptual Clarifications and Literature Review

Conceptualizing Political Participation:

Political participation has a rich history. It is an evolving concept, just like the majority of other ideas in use today. The idea has been at the centre of every discussion about democracy, from the active involvement of the Greek city-states to the Schumpeterian rejection of that model (Beck, 1997). The normative question of how much and what kind of popular participation in political affairs is desirable is highly relevant both politically and socially, even though the pursuit of a participatory, just, and sustainable society permeates all political systems (Bruce, 2004). The reason for this difficulty is because, while it is being used frequently in democratic theory, the term "participation" still has ambiguous definitions (Weale, 1999).

According to Steiner, (1988), political participation is extremely nuanced and ultimately unclear. He pointed out that while it is assumed that getting involved in political parties or organizations that defined themselves as pressure groups should be counted as political participation, it is unclear whether participation in other types of organizations, such as sports associations and traditional women's organizations, counts as political participation because they set the political context, provide their active members with administrative experience, and are capable of taking clear political action when their interests or principles are threatened.

According to Anifowose (2004), political participation refers to the voluntary actions that include holding public and party office, running for office, participating in election campaigns, casting a ballot, and being exposed to political stimuli. In a similar vein, (Maclosky, 1968) describes political engagement as a range of selfless endeavours that allow citizens of a community to directly or indirectly participate in the election of leaders and the formulation of public policy. Sanghera, (2005) in his own words defined political participation as the active involvement of individuals and groups in the governmental processes that impact their lives. This includes participating in decision-making as well as acting in opposition. On the other hand, (Lewu, 2005) describes political involvement as the range of methods through which individuals attempt to exert influence on the political process.

Lawson and Washburn (1969) define it as a process by which individuals acting singly or through group organization attempt to influence decision-making or alter the manner in which power may be distributed and the principles by which it may be

exercised in a particular society. Lawson (1997) in another breath contends that people who live in democratic systems recognize that individuals cannot or do not have the power to significantly alter the course of politics; instead, groups with similar socio-political interests, such as political parties or social movements, work together to bring about significant changes in the political landscape. (Anifowose, 2004) highlighted a number of intriguing tendencies pertaining to political participation in liberal democracies. A growing number of citizens are becoming more critical and knowledgeable, there is a reduction in faith in the abilities of political elites and institutions, traditional party loyalty is eroding, voter turnout is dropping, and unconventional political engagement is rising.

On the contrary, Kumari and Kidwai (2012) see women's political representation as a crucial element needed to guarantee the legitimacy and stability of any political system. Agbaje (1999) in his own words, regarded political representation of women as one of the core principles of a democratic society. It is essential to democracy because it entails a dedication to giving both men and women the same opportunities to realize their full potential. Therefore, without political representation and participation of women, democracy is unachievable (Agbaje, 1999).

According to (Kumari and Kidwai, 1999), those in positions of political authority in every culture are eager to guarantee that the populace is represented in politics to some degree. Thus, political representation characterizes the degree to which each member of society shares, participates in, or engages with the activities of that community. Because of the vital role that political activism plays, (Kumari and Kidwai, 1999) claim that depriving a significant portion of the public of it might lead to explosive situations. As a result, the degree to which women or any other group of people in a community participate in its political process closely correlates with their political power (Lewu, 2005).

Concept of Political Representation:

Defining Political representation is herculean task. Scholars have tried to explain it from a variety of angles. The term "representation" has multiple meanings, some of which contradict one another, and its definition is too vague to assist resolve these tensions, making the notion tangled not just because it has a central definition but also because it implies a contradiction Pitkin (2004). The idea is open to both a general and narrow interpretation. Generally, representation means that, when a group or individuals act as advocates and stand in for a bigger group that is too big to directly participate in decision-making, this is what is meant to be understood. In simpler terms, political representation is the process through which the views, opinions, and aspirations of all or a portion of the populace are translated into acts taken by the government on their behalf. A smaller number of people who have been given permission by the group being

represented perform this transformation, and the decisions that come from it have binding power over those who are being represented.

German social theorist Robert Von Mohl (1860) defined representation as the process by which the entire population, or a subset of it, has an expressed claim in government action, with that influence being exercised on their behalf by a small group of individuals with binding consequences for those represented. According to Hanna Pitkin 'Acting in for the good of others,' that is when representatives stand in for and act on behalf of the represented, is one of the most obvious definitions. Bernard Manin conceptualizes political representation as “making present the interests, opinions, and preferences of a group of citizens, whereby representatives engage in a deliberative process to express and act upon the public will.”

A fundamental tenet of democratic systems of governance is political representation, according to which representatives or elected officials represent the interests of the people they are supposed to represent. Citizens delegate their power to elected representatives in representative democracies, who then act as their constituents' advocates by enacting laws and making decisions. Reducing the gap between the general public and government decision-making is the goal of political representation. Citizens elect representatives to represent them in politics, who then take on the responsibility of advancing their interests, communicating their concerns, and making decisions that reflect the will of the people as a whole rather than participating personally in every political decision.

Gender roles have changed over time and been associated various historical periods and cultures (Akindele & Adeforiti 2021). Gender roles in ancient culture were often based on biological distinctions: women were assigned domestic and caring tasks, while men were typically linked with power, strength and public life. Women were marginalized and male ideas predominated as a result of the emergence of patriarchy, which furthered the establishment of flexible gender hierarchies (Goldenstein and Udry, 2008). But these established gender standards have been questioned by feminist movements and social revolutions, opening the door for greater gender equality and recognition of diverse gender identities.

Literature Review

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, has an estimated population of 193 million, with women comprising 49.2% and men 50.8% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Despite making up nearly half the population and playing crucial roles in political stability, socio economic development, and family life, women in Nigeria have historically been marginalized from political leadership. During the precolonial period,

women significantly influenced social, economic, and political structures. However, colonial rule systematically eroded women's decision-making roles by excluding them from formal governance structures (Hamalai, 2014). The Richards Constitution of 1946 established a House of Chiefs in Northern Nigeria, and by 1951, the Macpherson Constitution extended the structure to both Northern and Western Regions. Women like Margaret Ekpo, Janet Mokelu, and Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti were appointed to the Southern Nigerian House of Chiefs, but their roles were largely advisory and lacked legislative power.

Women's political underrepresentation continued through the First Republic (1963–1966) and the early post-independence years. Wuraola Esan became the first woman elected to the Federal Parliament in 1960 as an Ibadan West senatorial nominee. Margaret Ekpo also made history as a member of the Eastern Regional House of Assembly between 1961 and 1966. During the Second Republic (1979–1983), few women secured elective offices; Franca Afegbua was the only woman elected to the Senate in 1983 (Oluyemi, 2016). In the short-lived Third Republic, Kofo Bucknor-Akerele and Florence Ita-Giwa won elections to the Senate and House of Representatives, respectively. Despite these isolated successes, women's broader participation in elective politics remained limited, even though women continued to play vital roles in advocating for human rights, security, and peace.

The advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999 brought renewed efforts to address gender imbalances. Initiatives such as Nigeria's ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the creation of the National Commission for Women (1989), later upgraded to the Ministry of Women Affairs (1995), and the launch of the National Gender Policy (2006) aiming for 35% affirmative action, sought to promote women's inclusion. Other initiatives included the Nigeria Women Trust Fund (2011), the Women Political Empowerment Office, the 100 Women Lobby Group, and INEC's adoption of a gender policy (Oluyemi, 2016).

Nonetheless, women's involvement in decision-making and resource allocation remains marginal. National Bureau of Statistics data (2017) show significant disparities, with few women occupying senior governmental positions. In the 1999 elections, only 16 women won seats in the National Assembly, 3 in the Senate and 13 in the House of Representatives. Their numbers rose slightly to 25 in 2003, peaking at 36 in 2007. However, this progress was not sustained, with representation falling to 32 women in 2011, 29 in 2015, and just 17 in 2019. The trend persisted in the 2023 general elections, where women secured only 4 seats out of 109 in the Senate (2.8%) and 17 out of 360 in the House of Representatives (4.7%), amounting to a mere 4.3% of the total 469 National Assembly members.

Centrality and Relevance of Political Representation to Democratic Practice :

A vital component of democratic governance is political representation, which guarantees that the opinions and concerns of all citizens are sufficiently heard and taken into account. In reality, representation defines democracy, therefore the two concepts are interwoven. Equality of representation in politics reveals democracy's fundamental essence. There are two main reasons why the idea of political representation has become so important and relevant in modern democratic thought. The first consideration pertains to the discrepancy between traditional ideas of democratic representation, which are predominantly focused on electoral representation based on territory, and the evolving political setting that is marked by increased intricacy, diversity, and dependence on non-formal discussions and agreements to establish political validity (Warren & Urbinati, 2008). Democracy is a system of government that encourages citizens from all walks of life to actively participate in politics. It encourages people from all walks of life to get involved in forming the nation's leadership and supports equal opportunities for men and women to participate in political processes. Democracy is a form of government that encourages participation in politics from all spheres of society, guaranteeing similar opportunities for men and women to engage in politics as citizens or representatives. It is a system that encourages participation from people with different backgrounds in forming the nation's political leadership. As a result, democracy is universally recognized as the only acceptable form of government that guarantees unbiased and equitable governance for both genders, eradicating any prejudices or preferences. (Sunday, 2013). The health and effectiveness of democracy are directly impacted by representation across all identities, including racial, sexual, and socioeconomic (Teen Vogue, 2020). Evidently enough, representation builds up the foundations of democracy. "A meaningful partnership between men and women in the oversight of the affairs of society, where they work in equality and complementarity, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences," is necessary for democracy to be achieved. -The Universal Declaration on Democracy adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in September, 1997.

On the relevance of women representation in governance, Dovi (2006) itemizes seven reasons why women representations are necessary in the society. "They include the role model argument, the justice argument, the trust argument, the increased participation argument, the legitimacy argument, the transformative argument and the overlooked interest argument. According to her, "the role model argument contends that having female representatives improves female citizens' self-esteem. The justice argument contends that fairness demands that men and women be present in roughly equal numbers in the political arena. The trust argument focuses on the past betrayals of historically disadvantaged groups by privileged groups. The legitimacy argument contends that the perceived legitimacy of democratic institutions varies with the number of representatives from historically disadvantaged groups. The transformative argument contends that women allow democratic institutions to live up to their ideals. The overlooked interest

argument contends that democratic deliberations and political agenda can be improved by having female representatives in public offices” (Dovi, 2006).

These roles also affirm the indispensable functions of women in the society beyond household level. From the above arguments, on the indispensable necessity of women representation in politics, one can infer that there are elements of freedom and paradigm shift from the usual home managerial roles of women to the public sphere of a voice that needs inclusion in decision making.

Gender Policy:

Gender Policy is a very important term that has drawn attention in Nigeria, it is a set of regulations, guidelines, and principles that seek to promote the gender rights of women in society, the policy seeks to combat the numerous forms of discrimination and inequality experienced by women to achieve equality between the sexes. (UN Women 2021). Gender policy was launched in Nigeria in 2006 and is a guideline for gender-sensitive programs and policies implementation across various sectors in Nigeria. Gender policy acknowledges gender inequalities that have affected women's participation in politics and governance. Adesoji and Adeyemi (2016) opined that the policy seeks to empower women by providing them with resources for their well-being and to increase women's participation in politics and governance by advocating for affirmative action measures which increase women's representation in decision-making positions.

Ndubuisi, (2017) observed that years back, research has proved beyond all doubts that gender disparity exists in gender distribution in society and the entire sectors in general despite the National Gender Policy, gender disparity remains a colossal issue in Nigeria. Women remained disconnected from politics and decision-making positions, particularly in the national assembly, women receive huge discrimination and marginalization in the political realm which deters them from participating in governance. But to some small degree, the policy has had some positives in advancing female participation in politics and governance in Nigeria, with it leading to the number of women contesting for political seats in the country, but women's representation remains low relative to other countries on earth. The policy of women's participation has some challenges; political will has been missing in carrying out the policy at both national and local levels. Financial and human resources are issues in policy implementation. Agagu (2010) observed that parameters for the implementation of the policy should be established which will have an effect on the final results of the policy because the instant a policy is implemented it should be adhered to. But on this issue of gender representation, the policy is not well implemented. Agagu (2011) quoted in Adefisoye D. & Adefisoye T. (2011) opined that implementation of policy is in the downstream of the

policy process, with no implementation policy meaning nothing to citizens at best it would only make their hopes high until frustration set in which precisely is what occurs policy on women's representation in politics.

Theory of Descriptive Representation.

Scholars such as Hanna Pitkin (1967) and Jane Mansbridge (1999) have contributed significantly to developing the theory of descriptive representation. According to this theory, legislators who share demographic characteristics—gender, race, or age—with their constituents are in a better position to understand and represent their interests. In *The Concept of Representation*, Pitkin focuses on political representation that is representative of the demographic makeup of the population. Likewise, Mansbridge, in books like *Representation and Why We Lost the ERA*, calls attention to the unique ways different social groups, including women, experience politics, and how the representation of such groups influences the policy outcomes.

The underlying assumption of descriptive representation is that similarity between legislators and constituents leads to more responsive policymaking. More particularly, in the context of women's representation, the theory contends that women's underrepresentation in legislatures would often result in marginalization of issues such as gender equality and women's rights. Empirical studies based on this notion tend to examine to what extent female presence or absence in legislatures influences the formulation, prioritization, and passage of gender-based legislation.

Despite constituting almost 50% of Kwara population and playing key roles in election processes, particularly grass-root mobilization and campaigns, women in Kwara remain largely underrepresented in elective positions. According to Ismaila and Othman (2016) democracy remains a type of constitutional government where the electorates elect their representatives to stand for them in government to manage their interests, values and needs. It is a mirror through which political system realizes the value of transparency, accountability, stable rule of law and responsible bureaucratic process (Inokoba & Kumokor2012). According to IPU (1998) “equal representation is a basic right of citizenship to be exercised under condition of freedom, equity, transparency and responsibility with due respect for the plurality of views and interests of the polity”. By implication therefore, all adult citizens should enjoy equal suffrage and at no time should a group or gender be discriminated against in political process.

Descriptive representation theory ultimately concern about representatives either duly elected or appointed to represent the people through the performance of core functions that include making laws for his constituents, providing effective oversight of the executive and ensuring policies and laws of government are responsible to the needs of electorate. Therefore, for a parliament to be true ‘representative’ it should be

miniaturised or microcosm of gender, race and ethnic which they represent in order to avoid representation deficit. The narrative should change from representatives represent women but rather elected women representatives represent women. Below is the table capturing the synopsis of legislative activities spanning from 2015 to 2023 in Kwara State legislature.

Table 1

Summary of Legislative Activities in the 8th and 9th Assemblies in Kwara State.

SS/N	Activities	8th Assembly	9th Assembly
11	Number of female Representatives	4	0
22	Total number of Bills	55	36
33	Gender related bills	1	1 (Executive)
44	Bills assented to by Executive Governor	40	27
55	Total number of Motions	126	58
66	Gender related motions	5	0
77	House Committee Chairman on Women Affairs	Female	Male

Source: Researcher's survey 2025

An analysis of the legislative activities in the 8th and 9th Assemblies of Kwara State reveals a clear correlation between the presence of women in legislative positions and the prioritization of gender-related legislation. The data speaks volumes about the crucial role women play in shaping inclusive and gender-sensitive policy-making.

1. Women Representation and Legislative Productivity.

In the 8th Assembly, there were only 4 female representatives, while the 9th Assembly had none. During the 8th Assembly: 55 bills were introduced, and 40 were assented to by the Executive. A total of 126 motions were raised, including 5 gender-related motions. In contrast, the 9th Assembly, with zero female lawmakers, introduced 36 bills with 27 passed, and only 58 motions were raised — none of which addressed gender issues.

This dramatic drop in both quantity and diversity of legislative activity highlights a critical decline in the Assembly's inclusiveness and responsiveness to gender concerns.

2. Impact on Gender-Related Legislation.

The absence of women in the 9th Assembly appears to have significantly weakened advocacy for gender issues: The 8th Assembly, with female voices present, saw five gender-related motions. The 9th Assembly, lacking any female representatives, presented no gender-related motions, and only one gender-related bill, which came from the Executive — not the lawmakers themselves. This shows a distinct decline in proactive legislative support for gender issues when women are not present to champion them.

3. Leadership of the Women Affairs Committee.

Another critical difference lies in the Chairmanship of the Women Affairs Committee: In the 8th Assembly, the Chairman was a female, which aligned well with the pursuit of gender-responsive policies. However, in the 9th Assembly, a male Chairman took over, and the focus on gender legislation noticeably declined. While men can and should advocate for women's rights, evidence suggests that female leadership in gender-focused committees strengthens the drive for inclusive laws.

4. The Broader Implication.

These trends suggest that representation matters —not only for fairness but for function. Women in legislative positions bring unique perspectives and are more likely to push forward gender-sensitive issues. Their absence risks neglecting a substantial portion of the population whose needs require legislative interest.

The comparison between the 8th and 9th Assemblies in Kwara State underscores the significant positive influence of female lawmakers on gender-related legislation. Increasing women's representation in legislative houses is not merely a matter of equality — it is a matter of ensuring that governance is holistic, inclusive, and responsive to all citizens. Going forward, deliberate efforts must be made to support and elect more women into legislative roles to foster a more balanced and progressive policy environment.

Methodology

This study employed qualitative research design. It obtained primary qualitative data from interview and focus group discussion and secondary qualitative data from secondary sources such as legislative records, reports from INEC websites, journals, articles and other relevant academic literature to explore gender parity in Nigerian legislature and its effects on gender legislation. The study total population comprised 130 respondents and Hagaman and Wutich (2017) proportionate population sampling method was used to arrive at twenty-five respondents. Purposive sampling was employed for interviews and focus groups. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis, identifying key patterns related to gender bias, political barriers, and women's electoral success. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality were upheld throughout. Limitations include potential response bias and the non-generalizability of qualitative findings due to purposive sampling.

Table 2: Table below showing the purposive sampling, their population and corresponding numbers of interview.

SS/N	Respondents	Population	Interviewees
11	House Committee on Commerce, Industry and Women Affairs (Legislators KWHA).	24	5
22	APC State working Committee.	10	2
33	PDP State Working Committee.	10	2
44	APC Women leaders	16	3
55	PDP Women leaders	16	3
66	FIDA, NAWOJ (NGOs)	10	2
77	Gender and Inclusivity Unit (INEC)	10	2
88	Experts on Gender, Legislative and Nigeria government and politics (Academics)	16	3
99	Director of Women (Ministry of Women Affairs)	18	3
	TOTAL	130	25

Source: Researcher's survey 2025

From the above table 1, the study population stood at 130. However, the study relied on Hagaman and Wutich (2017) to generate sample size since the study is qualitative research. The sampling size agreed that 25 interviews are sufficient to identify common

themes within a relative group. Although a larger sample size from 20 to 40 interviews to achieve data saturation was recommended, however for the purpose of this study 25 interviews were selected as sample size which is the midway between 20 to 40 interviews as stipulated for a larger group. Probability Proportionate to Population (PPP) formula was employed to allot interviewees from each cluster.

Data Presentation

Kwara State legislative house in relation to the population of women in the state and their roles in the electoral processes reveals a striking contrast and huge gap between male and female citizens. After every election cycle, women struggle to achieve a small fraction of the state political offices both elective and appointive. It is crucial to recognize how women in politics are relegated to the backstage while their male counterparts dominate and control all positions in the state, hence denying the state inclusivity and oneness between the two genders. Interview responses reveal that underrepresentation of women is felt at every governmental level, permeating from local to state and federal level.

According to key informants (KIs), there is growing concern for adequate representation of women in every sector of our lives and failure to achieve this amounts to not only injustice and violation of fundamental human rights but also a neglect of the significant ideas and potentials that could contribute to the state's development. For instance, KI-2 remarked that *“the level of women representation in Kwara politics is quite low and not encouraging at all,”* highlighting the general belief that women are not adequately represented in governance issues. KI-7 emphasised this point further by saying *“when you look at the population of women in Kwara state both literate and non-literate, you will see that women are not really represented in the Kwara’s Assembly especially in the 9th assembly”*

In another breath KI-10 noted that, *“the 8th assembly was even better and one could say it is not satisfactory but the 9th Assembly was far worse and problematic for us because all the 24 members were male”* highlighting the fact that though the 8th Assembly had its modest women representation and provided a platform for some gender issues to be discussed. The four female legislators, who constituted 16.7% of the total membership, were actively engaged in some motions believed to be gender focused. However, this presence was not without limitations as they lacked the legislative traction to produce tangible outcomes. These qualitative findings align with the quantitative data presented earlier, showing a significant reduction in female representation from four female members in the 8th Assembly to zero in the 9th. This stark difference is indicative of how political structures directly influence the visibility and advocacy for women’s issues within legislative frameworks. The 8th Assembly, with its limited female presence, still allowed some space for gender discussions, though these were not sufficient to bring

about comprehensive legislative action. The 9th Assembly, with no female legislators, effectively silenced these discussions, thereby hindering the legislative agenda for gender justice.

The absence of women in the 9th Assembly resulted in a void where gender-specific issues, such as the Violence against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Bill, were left unaddressed. The VAPP Bill, which aims to provide legal protection for victims of domestic violence and other forms of abuse, had gained some traction in the 8th Assembly, albeit with limited success. In the 9th Assembly, however, with no female representation, the bill was neither debated nor passed. This highlights the direct correlation between female representation in the legislature and the advancement of gender-based legislative reforms.

Further comparing Kwara's situation with other states offers a clearer picture of the impact of female representation on gender-related legislative outcomes. In Ekiti State, for instance, the 8th and 9th Assemblies maintained at least 20% female representation, which resulted in notable advancements in gender-sensitive policies, such as the establishment of the Gender-Based Violence (Prohibition) Law in 2020. Similarly, Kaduna State, under its governor's commitment to gender equality, institutionalized a 30% female quota in the legislature, further enhancing gender advocacy and policy development. These cases demonstrate that female representation in legislative bodies directly contributes to the prioritization of women's issues within the policymaking process.

Nationally, female representation in the Nigerian National Assembly has remained low, with only 4.7% female participation in the 8th Assembly and a further decline to 3.6% in the 9th Assembly. However, unlike Kwara, some states like Ekiti have been able to institutionalize mechanisms that support gender-sensitive policies, even with relatively low female representation. This suggests that while female representation is a necessary condition for gender-inclusive legislation, it is not the sole determinant. The presence of robust civil society advocacy, political will, and executive support also play a crucial role in advancing gender equality.

The absence of female legislators in Kwara's 9th Assembly, therefore, underscores the vulnerability of gender issues to political dynamics. It reveals that gender advocacy in the legislature is not merely a function of having women in the room, but also depends on the presence of legislative commitment to gender equality. Without women in the legislature, gender-related issues are often side-lined, resulting in a lack of legislative action on critical gender justice matters.

This gap in gender representation and the ensuing stagnation of gender-related legislation in Kwara is reflective of the broader challenges faced by women in the

political arena. It suggests that female legislators are not only essential for advancing gender-specific laws but are also key in ensuring that these laws are prioritized and enacted. The experience of Kwara, where female representation dwindled to zero, stands as a cautionary tale for other states and underscores the need for continued advocacy and structural reforms to ensure that women's voices are not only heard but also act as powerful agents of change in the legislative process.

Therefore, the level of impact that women had on gender issues in the 8th and 9th Assemblies of Kwara State was directly linked to their representation. The presence of women in the 8th Assembly allowed for minimal engagement with gender issues, but the absence of female legislators in the 9th Assembly led to a dramatic regression, resulting in the silencing of crucial gender discussions. This analysis highlights the vital role that female legislators play in advancing gender justice, and the negative consequences of their absence from the legislative process. The findings also point to the need for greater efforts to institutionalize gender equality in legislative frameworks, ensuring that women's issues remain a priority, regardless of the political dynamics at play.

1. Descriptive Data on Women's Representation in Kwara State Legislature

Assembly	Total Members	Female Members	Percentage of Women (%)
8th	24	4	16.7%
9th	24	0	0%

Source: Researchers survey, 2025

In the 8th Assembly (2015–2019), women constituted 16.7% of the membership. However In the 9th Assembly (2019–2023), no woman was elected at both the state and federal levels from Kwara State. This means that absence of female legislators in the 9th Assembly is a critical setback for the advancement of gender-related legislative initiatives.

2. Gender-Related Motions and Bills Raised in the 8th Assembly

Bill/Motion Code	Title	Sponsor	Gender Relevance	Assembly
KWHA 21	Discouraging the Practice of Female Genital Mutilation in Kwara State	Hon. AbdulKadir Segilola Ramat (Ilorin Central)	Gender-Focused	8th

KWHA 13	Promoting the Welfare of Widows in Kwara State	Hon. Aisha Bodunrin Ibrahim (Ilorin- East)	Gender-Focused	8th
KWHAM 44	Preventing Road Accidents on our Streets in Kwara State	Hon. Aishat Bodurin Ibrahim (Ilorin-East)	General but indirectly gender-relevant (safety concerns for women)	8th
KWHAM 4	Protection of our Trees Against Environmental Hazard	Hon. Felicia Ebun Owolabi (Ekiti)	Non-Gender-Specific	8th
KWHAM 20	Putting Silo at Oke Oyi into Use	Hon. Felicia Ebun Owolabi (Ekiti)	Non-Gender-Specific	8th
KWHAM 21	Addressing the Poor Condition of our Markets in Kwara State	Hon. Segilola Ramat (Ilorin-Central)	Indirect Gender Impact (market women affected)	8th

Source: Researchers survey, 2025

Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal a clear and compelling correlation between female legislative presence and the prioritization of gender-sensitive motions in the Kwara State House of Assembly. Though women were merely 16.7% seated in the legislature during the 8th Assembly, gender-major motion like KWHA 21 (Discouraging the practice of Female Genital Mutilation) and KWHA 13 (Promoting Welfares for Widows) were tabled. These measures addressed directly issues of gender, mirroring the significant role of women legislators in championing women's welfare and rights.

Besides direct movements, other motions like KWHAM 21 (Renovations of the markets) and KWHAM 44 (Securing the streets against all forms of accident) also had indirect gender advantages in accordance with women's over-representation in the shadow economy and vulnerability to urban hazards. Such findings agree with scholarly claims that women parliamentarians are more likely to support motions that will benefit women and the poor, even for overall development motions (Bauer, 2012). Conversely, the 9th Assembly with no female members experienced a huge legislative loss in gender issues. No gender-related motions or bills were recorded, representing a legislative gap in areas such as prevention of gender violence, maternal health initiatives, and economic empowerment of women. This is a testament to the imperative role of female legislators as not only symbolic figures but also active agents of gender justice in policy making circles (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021).

The absence of women's voices during the 9th Assembly also caused broader policy shortfalls. Issues that typically hinge on strong gender advocacy, such as child protection laws, domestic violence policy, and women's entrepreneurship programs, lacked legislative attention. This is a prime example of what has been described as "policy drift"—where absence of underrepresented group means there is an absence of their specific policy needs (Phillips, 1995). To further situate the Kwara State results, this study compares representation and legislative success on women's matters in the other two Nigerian states, Lagos and Ekiti. Both are an appropriate point of comparison because, with relatively low female representation, both states recorded high success in gender-beneficial legislation. This comparative study examines how the presence or lack of even a few women legislators influences gender legislation outcomes.

Four of a total of twenty-four were women in the 8th Kwara State House of Assembly (2015–2019), which equated to 16.7% of the legislature. During this assembly, gender-sensitive motions such as Discouraging the Practice of Female Genital Mutilation (KWAHA 21) and Promoting the Welfare of Widows (KWAHA 13) were tabled successfully. During the 9th Assembly (2019–2023), no woman was elected to the assembly and, therefore, there was a precipitous fall in gender-specific legislative activity..

For reference, the Ekiti State House of Assembly contained 15.4% female representatives in its 8th Assembly and 7.7% in the 9th. Despite the dip, Ekiti still managed to pass the amendment to the Gender-Based Violence (Prohibition) Law in 2019, demonstrating sustained gender-responsive policy making capability (FIDA Ekiti, 2022). Similarly, Lagos State maintained a relatively higher percentage of women, with 20% representation in the 8th Assembly and 15% in the 9th. The Lagos parliament passed landmark legislations such as the Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Law and the Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Agency during this period (DSVRT Annual Report, 2022).

The implication of the comparison is that even limited female legislators, as in Ekiti and Lagos, are instrumental in sustaining legislative concern with gender issues. The inverse, Kwara's absence of legislators from the other gender in the 9th Assembly, was followed by an astonishing decline in gender-focused legislative outputs. This supports the thesis that women's political representation is neither symbolic nor superfluous but functionally necessary to advance gender interests (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). The Kwara case illustrates how institutional lack of interest in gender balance in political representation can lead to substantive policy backtracking for women's rights and welfare.

Comparative Table

State	Assem bly	%Female Representation	Key Gender Bills Raised	Observed Impact
Kwara	8th	16.7%	FGM motion, Welfare of Widows motion	Moderate gender focus
Kwara	9th	0%	None	Major gender legislative setback
Ekiti	8th	15.4%	Gender-based bills (initial)	Positive gender focus
Ekiti	9th	7.7%	GBV Law amendment	Sustained legislative attention
Lagos	8th	20%	VAPP Law strengthened	Strong gender protection
Lagos	9th	15%	DSVR Agency Law passed	Continuing progress

Source: Researchers survey, 2025

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, the pattern observed in Kwara State substantiates broader empirical findings that women's political representation is crucial to advancing inclusive legislation. As research consistently shows, female legislators bring distinct experiences and priorities that shape legislative outcomes in favour of social equity and gender justice (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008; Wängnerud, 2009). Thus, this study confirms that without women's formal political inclusion, gender advocacy within the legislature suffers significant setbacks, leaving critical women's rights and welfare issues under-addressed.

Based on the findings of this study, it becomes imperative to recommend strategic interventions to address the legislative gender gap observed in Kwara State. Firstly, there

is a pressing need to promote and facilitate greater women's participation in electoral politics through legal and policy reforms mandating a minimum threshold for female representation should be considered. Drawing lessons from countries that have successfully increased women's political participation, such as Rwanda and South Africa (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021), Kwara State could introduce laws that guarantee a certain percentage of legislative seats for women. Mechanisms such as gender quotas or internal party reforms aimed at supporting female candidacies should be actively pursued to ensure more balanced representation in future Assemblies.

In addition, aggressive sensitization should be geared toward enlightening the populace against misinformation and misconceptions about women in leadership capacity. Equally it is important for the need to strengthen the political capacity of women. Initiatives such as leadership training, political mentorship programs, and access to campaign financing are critical to empowering women to contest and succeed in electoral competitions. Without building this capacity, the challenges of underrepresentation are likely to persist. Moreover, the legislature must institutionalize gender mainstreaming as a permanent feature of its agenda. This could take the form of establishing a dedicated Committee on Gender Affairs or integrating gender analysis into the drafting of bills and motions, ensuring that gender-sensitive issues do not depend solely on the presence of female legislators to gain attention.

Finally, there is a need to establish monitoring and accountability structures. Regular assessments of legislative outputs should be conducted to evaluate how gender-responsive the Assembly's activities are, thus holding legislators accountable to the broader goals of gender equity and inclusive governance.

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