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GENDER POLITICS AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA: THE EXPERIENCE OF SENATOR NATASHA HADIZA AKPOTI-UDUAGHAN

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ABSTRACT
Gender politics and women's political participation in Nigeria are shaped by patriarchal beliefs, gender stereotypes, unequal political opportunities, party gatekeeping, institutional discrimination, intimidation, and harassment. These factors influence women's access to elective offices, political representation, legislative participation, and decision-making, as reflected in the political experience of Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan. The study examines gender politics and women's political participation in Nigeria, the experience of Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan. The study adopted a case study design. The population comprised 474,554 registered voters in Kogi Central Senatorial District, from which a sample of 400 respondents was drawn, alongside 10 key informants. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews, analysed using descriptive statistics, simple linear regression, and thematic analysis. The study was anchored on Liberal Feminist Theory. The findings revealed that, as perceived by respondents, gender discrimination significantly influences Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's access to elective office through patriarchal beliefs, gender stereotypes, and unequal political opportunities, explaining 41.2% of the variation ($R = 0.642$, $R^2 = 0.412$, $\beta = 0.642$, $t = 16.271$, $p < 0.05$). Political party gatekeeping also affects her political representation through restrictive nomination processes, influential party networks, and unequal campaign support, accounting for 44.6% of the variation ($R = 0.668$, $R^2 = 0.446$, $\beta = 0.668$, $t = 17.453$, $p < 0.05$). Similarly, institutional discrimination influences her legislative participation through unequal procedures, institutional power relations, and controversies surrounding her Senate suspension, explaining 47.7% of the variation ($R = 0.691$, $R^2 = 0.477$, $\beta = 0.691$, $t = 18.579$, $p < 0.05$). Political intimidation and harassment further affect her participation in legislative decision-making through hostility, pressure, and personal attacks, accounting for 51.1% of the variation ($R = 0.715$, $R^2 = 0.511$, $\beta = 0.715$, $t = 19.891$, $p < 0.05$). The study recommended that government and political stakeholders promote gender equality and equal political opportunities, while political parties and legislative institutions adopt transparent procedures and effective measures to protect women against discrimination, intimidation and harassment.

Keywords: Gender politics, women's political participation, gender discrimination, political party gatekeeping, Liberal Feminist Theory.

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Introduction

At the global level, women's political participation is essential to democratic governance and gender equality. Although international frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action promote equal political rights, women continue to face discrimination, political violence and limited access to campaign resources. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (2025) reports that women occupied 27.2 per cent of parliamentary seats worldwide, reflecting continued gender imbalance in political leadership.

In Africa, affirmative action and constitutional reforms have improved women's political representation in countries such as Rwanda, South Africa, Senegal and Namibia. However, patriarchal beliefs, cultural restrictions, financial barriers and political intimidation continue to limit women's participation, particularly in West Africa. Arowolo and Aluko (2023) identify socio-cultural and institutional barriers as major constraints on women's political representation across the continent.

In Nigeria, women's political participation has remained low despite constitutional guarantees of equality, democratic reforms and national commitments to gender inclusion. Although women participate as voters, party members, campaign organisers and candidates, their representation in elective offices remains considerably below that of men. Ibitoye (2023) observes that gender imbalance has continued to weaken women's political empowerment and representation in Nigeria's democratic space. The 2023 general elections further exposed the persistent imbalance in women's political representation in Nigeria, as only three women were elected to the 109-member Senate and 15 women secured seats in the 360-member House of Representatives (Ugwu, 2025; Ogunbodede & Akinyetun, 2026). These figures reveal the limited conversion of women's electoral participation into political representation.

Several factors account for this situation, including patriarchal beliefs, cultural and religious restrictions, inadequate financial resources, political violence and discrimination within political parties. Adebayo (2024) identifies the difficulties women encounter in navigating Nigerian political spaces, while Raji (2024) highlights the influence of cultural practices on women's representation in leadership. Similarly, Kumije et al. (2025) emphasise the importance of gender inclusion in governance. These barriers affect women's ability to secure party nominations, finance campaigns, mobilise political support and compete effectively with male candidates. Although the National Gender Policy and other gender equality initiatives seek to improve women's representation, weak implementation and limited institutional commitment continue to restrict their impact.

Despite these challenges, some Nigerian women have continued to challenge male-dominated political structures and establish themselves in elective positions. Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan represents an important example of this development. Her election in 2023 as the senator representing Kogi Central Senatorial District, which made her the first elected female senator from Kogi State, marked a significant achievement in a political environment where women remain poorly represented. Her emergence demonstrated that women can mobilise electoral support, challenge established political interests and occupy influential legislative positions. Oke and Opeyemi-Enoch (2026) explain that Akpoti-Uduaghan's political experience illustrates the intersection of parliamentary politics, gender relations and institutional authority in Nigeria. However, Akpoti-Uduaghan's experience also draws attention to the challenges women.

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However, Akpoti-Uduaghan's experience also draws attention to the challenges women may encounter after gaining political office. On 6 March 2025, she was suspended from the Senate for six months following a dispute over her seating arrangement and parliamentary procedure, which came shortly after she alleged sexual harassment against Senate President Godswill Akpabio, which he denied. While the Senate maintained that the suspension resulted from alleged misconduct and violations of its rules, the episode generated wider debate about gender discrimination, political authority and the treatment of women in legislative institutions. Yusuf et al. (2025) examine the controversy in relation to parliamentary authority, democratic accountability and women's representation in Nigeria's legislature. This experience raises questions about women's political independence, institutional protection, and ability to participate meaningfully in legislative decision-making. Against this background, the study examines gender politics and women's political participation in Nigeria, with particular attention to Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's political experience. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine the effect of gender discrimination on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's access to elective office.
2. Assess the effect of political party gatekeeping on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's political representation.
3. Examine the effect of institutional discrimination on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's legislative participation.
4. Determine the effect of political intimidation and harassment on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's participation in legislative decision-making.

Research questions

The following research questions guided the study:

i. What is the effect of gender discrimination on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan’s access to elective office?
ii. What is the effect of political party gatekeeping on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan’s political representation?
iii. What is the effect of institutional discrimination on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan’s legislative participation?
iv. What is the effect of political intimidation and harassment on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan’s participation in legislative decision-making?

Research hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the study:

i. H_{01}: Gender discrimination has no significant effect on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan’s access to elective office.
ii. H_{02}: Political party gatekeeping has no significant effect on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan’s political representation.
iii. H_{03}: Institutional discrimination has no significant effect on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan’s legislative participation.
iv. H_{04}: Political intimidation and harassment have no significant effect on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan’s participation in legislative decision-making.

Conceptual clarifications

Gender discrimination

Gender discrimination refers to the unequal treatment of individuals based on their gender, particularly when women are denied equal opportunities, rights and access to political

institutions. Bankert (2020) explains that gender differences influence women's political experiences and opportunities, while Idike et al. (2020) identify unequal representation and male-dominated power relations as expressions of gender inequality in Nigeria. Similarly, the National Democratic Institute (2021) emphasises that women's equal participation in political decision-making is essential to democratic governance. These perspectives establish gender discrimination as a practice that limits women's political opportunities and influence.

In Nigerian politics, gender discrimination is reflected in male dominance, patriarchal beliefs and institutional practices that restrict women's access to leadership. Abdulyakeen (2022) highlights the subordinate position often assigned to women in political institutions, while Ette and Akpan-Obong (2022) identify party gatekeeping, intimidation, financial limitations and unequal political networks as barriers to female participation. These arguments show that discrimination operates through both cultural expectations and political structures that favour men

Gender discrimination also manifests in women's limited representation in elective and appointive positions. Jacob, Nwigwe and Ikedinma (2023) associate women's political exclusion with persistent marginalisation, while Agaigbe and Akuraga (2024) identify gender stereotypes, inadequate party support and limited access to political resources as factors restricting female candidates. Similarly, Adebayo, Awe and Oyebode (2024) highlight cultural beliefs, financial barriers, political violence and godfatherism as constraints on women's political participation. These perspectives demonstrate that gender discrimination involves social, economic and institutional practices that undermine women's political opportunities.

Gender discrimination further affects how women are treated after gaining political positions. Kim (2025) explains that gender-based disadvantages can persist even within seemingly neutral political selection processes, while Barnes and O'Brien (2025) highlight how gender influences women's access to political power and their exercise of authority within institutions. In this study, gender discrimination refers to the gender-related barriers and unequal institutional experiences encountered by Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan in securing political office, exercising legislative authority and participating in political decision-making.

Political participation

Political participation refers to the voluntary activities through which individuals engage in political processes and seek to influence government decisions, leadership selection and public policies. Weiss (2020) explains that it includes voting, joining political parties, signing petitions and participating in campaigns. Similarly, Ceccarini (2020) views it as activities through which individuals influence political authorities and outcomes. These definitions establish political participation as active involvement in governance and political decision-making.

Nissen (2021) describes political participation as the involvement of individuals and groups in political processes through which they express opinions and influence decisions. Similarly, Koc (2021) identifies voting, contacting political representatives and other forms of political engagement as important expressions of participation. These perspectives demonstrate that political participation involves more than voting; it also includes citizens' ability to express political interests and influence public decisions.

Ette and Akpan-Obong (2022) explain women's political participation through activities such as voting, party membership and contesting elective positions. Similarly, Jeroense and Spierings (2022) identify demonstrations, petitions, party activities and other forms of civic engagement as means of influencing political processes. These definitions show that political

participation includes both formal electoral activities and non-electoral engagements aimed at influencing governance.

Omiya and Ojile (2023) examine women's political participation through their involvement and representation in elective and leadership positions, while Tambe and Jormfeldt (2024) identify voting, political party membership, community meetings and protests as important forms of political engagement. These perspectives establish that women's political participation involves both gaining access to political institutions and actively contributing to public decision-making. Shames et al. (2025) emphasise women's involvement in political activities beyond voting, including access to political resources and participation in public affairs. In this study, political participation refers specifically to Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's involvement in electoral contests, political party activities, legislative representation and decision-making, including the exercise of her political authority within the Nigerian Senate.

Theoretical framework

Liberal Feminist Theory provides a suitable foundation for examining gender politics and women's political participation, particularly Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's experiences. Advanced by early feminist thinkers such as Wollstonecraft (1792) and Mill (1869), the theory advocates equal rights and opportunities for women in education, society and politics. Okin (1989) further examined how patriarchal traditions and institutions sustain gender inequality. The theory maintains that women and men should enjoy equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities.

The basic assumptions of Liberal Feminist Theory are that women and men are entitled to equal rights and opportunities; gender discrimination is sustained by discriminatory laws, social attitudes and institutional practices; women should have equal access to education, employment, political leadership and decision-making; and legal and institutional reforms are necessary to remove barriers to women's advancement. The theory also assumes that women's exclusion from political institutions undermines democratic representation and that affirmative action, equal political rights and institutional reforms can improve their participation. It further recognises that women's political autonomy depends on their ability to participate in electoral processes, public deliberations and legislative decision-making (Okin, 1989; Nussbaum, 2000).

However, Liberal Feminist Theory has been criticised for emphasising legal equality without adequately addressing deeper structures of power and inequality. MacKinnon (1987) argues that formal equality does not eliminate women's subordination because male dominance is embedded in social institutions, while Young (1990) highlights the theory's limited attention to structural oppression. Similarly, hooks (1984) criticize its failure to adequately recognize differences among women based on class and other social conditions. Nevertheless, the theory remains relevant for explaining gender discrimination and the need for equal political opportunities.

The theory is relevant to this study because the political experience of Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan raises issues concerning gender discrimination, political party gatekeeping, institutional treatment, political intimidation, and women's participation in legislative decision-making. Her emergence as an elected senator demonstrates women's access to political leadership, while the controversies surrounding her legislative experience provide an opportunity to examine the institutional conditions under which women exercise political authority. Through the assumptions of Liberal Feminist Theory, the study examines whether women enjoy equal political opportunities, how gender-related barriers influence their participation, and the extent to which political institutions provide an enabling environment for

female representation. The theory therefore provides an appropriate basis for understanding the relationship between gender equality, institutional practices and women's political participation, using Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's political experience as its central focus.

Methodology

The study adopts a case study research design to examine gender politics and women's political participation through Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's political experiences. The design enables an in-depth examination of how gender discrimination, party gatekeeping, institutional discrimination, and political intimidation affect women's political opportunities, representation and legislative participation, while providing analytical insights into the broader challenges of women's political participation in Nigeria. The population of the study comprises the 474,554 registered voters in Kogi Central Senatorial District, including political party members, members of women's groups, and other stakeholders with knowledge of Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's political activities and experiences. The district covers five local government areas: Adavi, Ajaokuta, Okene, Okehi and Ogori-Magongo. The registered voter figures for the five local government areas are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Population of the Study

S/N	Local Government Area	Registered Voters
1	Adavi	114,663
2	Ajaokuta	96,504
3	Okene	151,243
4	Okehi	94,456
5	Ogori-Magongo	17,688
	Total	474,554

Source: INEC (2023).

The study adopted Yamane's (1967) formula to determine the sample size. The formula is stated below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = Sample size

N = the study population

1 = Constant

e = margin of error (level of precision) = 0.05 or 5%

Therefore, using the study population of 474,554, the formula was applied as follows:

$$n = \frac{474{,}554}{1 + 474{,}554 \times (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{474{,}554}{1 + 474{,}554 \times 0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{474{,}554}{1 + 1{,}186.385}$$

$$n = \frac{474{,}554}{1{,}187.385}$$

$$n = 399.66 \approx 400$$

The study adopted a proportionate stratified random sampling technique, with the five local government areas serving as strata, to select 400 respondents from Kogi Central Senatorial

District. The technique was considered appropriate because it ensures that each local government area is represented in proportion to its number of registered voters. The sampling frame consisted of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) register of registered voters, organised according to polling units in the five local government areas. First, the sample size was proportionately allocated to each LGA based on its registered voter population. Thereafter, polling units were used as the basis for identifying eligible respondents within each LGA. Respondents were selected through simple random sampling from the registered voters in the selected polling units, using ballot selection to give eligible voters an equal opportunity of participation. This procedure helped minimise selection bias and ensured adequate geographical representation across the five local government areas. The distribution is presented in Table 2

Table 2: Distribution of Sample Size

S/N	Local Government Area	Registered Voters	Sample Size
1	Adavi	114,663	97
2	Ajaokuta	96,504	81
3	Okene	151,243	127
4	Okehi	94,456	80
5	Ogori-Magongo	17,688	15
	Total	474,554	400

Source: Researchers' Compilation, 2026.

The study utilised both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were obtained through structured questionnaires administered to 400 respondents proportionately selected from the five local government areas of Kogi Central Senatorial District, and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted with 10 purposively selected stakeholders knowledgeable about gender politics and Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's political experiences. The questionnaire contained closed-ended questions measured on a five-point Likert scale, scored Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). A criterion mean of 3.00 was adopted as the decision rule, so that items with mean scores of 3.00 and above were accepted and those below 3.00 were rejected. The instrument covered gender discrimination, political party gatekeeping, institutional discrimination, political intimidation and harassment, and women's political participation. The interviews provided additional qualitative information to complement the questionnaire responses. Secondary data were obtained from textbooks, academic journals, newspapers, government publications, policy documents, electoral reports, conference papers, and other relevant materials on gender politics and women's political participation in Nigeria.

A pilot study was conducted using 40 respondents in Kogi East Senatorial District, outside the study area of Kogi Central Senatorial District. The pilot test assessed the clarity, consistency, and reliability of the questionnaire before its final administration. Data obtained were analysed using SPSS Version 25, and Cronbach's Alpha was employed to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. The coefficients obtained for the four sections of the questionnaire are presented in Table 3.6. Gender Discrimination recorded 0.872, Political Party Gatekeeping 0.840, Institutional Discrimination 0.917, while Political Intimidation and Harassment recorded 0.903. All coefficients exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. The study adopted a model specification to examine how each of the four independent variables affects the corresponding dimension of women's political participation, focusing on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's political experience. The models were specified as follows:

Model specification

Model 1: $AEO = \beta_0 + \beta_1 GD + \varepsilon$, Model 2: $PR = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PPG + \varepsilon$, Model 3: $LP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ID + \varepsilon$

Model 4: $LDM = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PIH + \varepsilon$

Where:

AEO = Access to Elective Office

PR = Political Representation

LP = Legislative Participation

LDM = Participation in Legislative Decision-Making

GD = Gender Discrimination

PPG = Political Party Gatekeeping

ID = Institutional Discrimination

PIH = Political Intimidation and Harassment

β_0 = Constant

β_1 = Regression Coefficient of the predictor in each model

ε = Error Term

The data collected were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25. Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were used to analyse respondents' demographic characteristics and questionnaire responses, while simple linear regression was employed to test the four hypotheses and determine the influence of each independent variable on the corresponding dimension of women's political participation. The analysis reported R, R^2, F, beta (β), t and significance values, with hypotheses tested at the 0.05 level of significance. Data obtained from the 10 Key Informant Interviews were analysed thematically by grouping responses into relevant themes, while secondary materials were examined through content analysis to complement and interpret the quantitative findings.

Data presentation and analysis

This section presents and analyses data collected from the field through structured questionnaires administered to respondents in Kogi Central Senatorial District of Kogi State. A total of 400 questionnaires were administered across the five local government areas of Adavi, Ajaokuta, Okene, Okehi and Ogori-Magongo, out of which 380 were properly completed and retrieved, representing a response rate of 95%, while 20 questionnaires, representing 5%, were not retrieved. The analysis was based on the 380 valid questionnaires, while information obtained from 10 Key Informant Interviews was used to complement the quantitative findings.

Table 3: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Attributes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	205	53.9
Female	175	46.1
Age (years)		
18-25	105	27.6
26-40	165	43.4
41-50	75	19.7
51 and above	35	9.2
Marital Status		
Single	140	36.8
Married	210	55.3

Divorced/Separated	18	4.7
Widowed	12	3.2
Educational Qualification		
SSCE/NECO	55	14.5
NCE/Diploma	85	22.4
Degree	155	40.8
Postgraduate	85	22.4
Local Government Area		
Adavi	92	24.2
Ajaokuta	77	20.3
Okene	121	31.8
Okehi	76	20.0
Ogori-Magongo	14	3.7
Total	380	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 3 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the 380 respondents selected from the five local government areas of Kogi Central Senatorial District. The gender distribution shows that males constituted 53.9 per cent, while females accounted for 46.1 per cent, indicating a fairly balanced representation of both sexes. Regarding age, respondents aged 26-40 years formed the largest group (43.4 per cent), followed by those aged 18-25 years (27.6 per cent), 41-50 years (19.7 per cent) and 51 years and above (9.2 per cent). This indicates that most respondents were within the active political and economically productive age groups.

In terms of marital status, married respondents constituted 55.3 per cent, singles accounted for 36.8 per cent, divorced or separated respondents represented 4.7 per cent, while widowed respondents made up 3.2 per cent. Regarding educational qualification, degree holders formed the largest group (40.8 per cent), followed by NCE/Diploma and postgraduate holders, each representing 22.4 per cent, while SSCE/NECO holders accounted for 14.5 per cent. The local government distribution showed that Okene had the highest number of respondents (31.8 per cent), followed by Adavi (24.2 per cent), Ajaokuta (20.3 per cent), Okehi (20.0 per cent) and Ogori-Magongo (3.7 per cent). Overall, the distribution provided a broad representation of respondents across the five local government areas and a basis for examining gender politics and women's political participation, particularly the political experiences of Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan.

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Table 4: Perceived Effect of Gender Discrimination on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's Access to Elective Office (N = 380)

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	Gender discrimination created difficulties for Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan in seeking elective political office.	35	45	40	140	120	3.70	1.28	Accepted
2	Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan faced greater criticism and opposition than male candidates during electoral contests.	30	50	45	135	120	3.70	1.26	Accepted
3	Patriarchal beliefs limited Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's opportunities to secure elective office.	40	45	35	140	120	3.67	1.31	Accepted
4	Gender discrimination affected Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's ability to mobilise political support and compete effectively in elections.	35	40	45	140	120	3.71	1.27	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4 presents respondents' views on the influence of gender discrimination on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's access to elective office. The first item recorded a mean score of 3.70, indicating that gender discrimination created difficulties for her in seeking elective political office. The second item recorded a mean score of 3.70, showing that she faced greater criticism and opposition than male candidates during electoral contests. The third item recorded a mean score of 3.67, indicating that patriarchal beliefs limited her opportunities to secure elective office. The fourth item recorded a mean score of 3.71, showing that gender discrimination affected her ability to mobilise political support and compete effectively in elections. Since all four mean scores exceeded the criterion mean of 3.00, all the items were accepted.

A community leader from Okene LGA, interviewed on 5th September, 2026, explained that:

"Gender discrimination remains a major challenge for women seeking elective political positions in Nigeria. Many people still believe that political leadership is more suitable for men than women. This perception creates difficulties for female politicians because they often have to work harder to convince party members and voters that they are equally capable of holding political office. Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan's political experience reflects the challenges women encounter when seeking elective positions in a male-dominated political environment."

A female political party member from Adavi LGA, interviewed on 7th September, 2026, stated that:

"Female politicians often face more criticism and opposition than their male counterparts during electoral campaigns. Their personal lives, appearance, and family responsibilities are sometimes used to question their suitability for political leadership. Senator Natasha also experienced public criticism and political opposition during her political journey. Such attitudes

discourage women from contesting elections and make political competition more difficult for them."

A youth leader from Ajaokuta LGA, interviewed on 9th September, 2026, observed that:

"Patriarchal beliefs and unequal access to political resources affect women's chances of securing elective positions. Men often have stronger political networks and greater financial support, while women must struggle to establish similar connections. Although Senator Natasha was able to overcome some of these barriers and win the election, her experience demonstrates the difficulties women face in mobilising political support and competing effectively with male candidates.

Table 5: Perceived Effect of Political Party Gatekeeping on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's Political Representation (N = 380)

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	Political party gatekeeping created obstacles for Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan in securing party nomination for elective office.	30	40	45	145	120	3.75	1.23	Accepted
2	Party leaders and influential members restricted Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's access to important party decision-making processes.	35	45	40	140	120	3.70	1.28	Accepted
3	Political party structures favoured male aspirants over Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan during candidate selection and electoral processes.	25	45	50	140	120	3.75	1.21	Accepted
4	Political party gatekeeping limited Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's opportunities to gain political support and representation within her party.	35	40	45	140	120	3.71	1.27	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 5 presents respondents' views on the effect of political party gatekeeping on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's political representation. The first item recorded a mean score of 3.75, indicating that party gatekeeping created obstacles for her in securing party nomination. The second item recorded a mean score of 3.70, showing that party leaders and influential members restricted her access to important party decision-making processes. The third item recorded a mean score of 3.75, indicating that party structures favoured male aspirants over her during candidate selection and electoral processes. The fourth item recorded a mean score of 3.71, showing that party gatekeeping limited her opportunities to gain political support and representation within her party. Since all four mean scores exceeded the criterion mean of 3.00, all the items were accepted.

A former political party executive from Adavi LGA, interviewed on 27th September, 2026, explained that:

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"Political party gatekeeping creates difficulties for female politicians seeking elective positions because party leaders and influential members often control the nomination process. Women may have the necessary qualifications and popular support but still struggle to secure party tickets because of internal political interests. Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan's political experience reflects the challenges women may face when seeking party nominations in a male-dominated political environment."

A youth political leader from Okene LGA, interviewed on 29th September, 2026, stated that:

"Party decision-making processes are often dominated by influential political actors who determine which aspirants receive support and recognition. Female politicians who do not have strong connections with these leaders may find it difficult to influence party decisions. In Senator Natasha's case, her political journey demonstrates the difficulties women can encounter in gaining acceptance and support within established party structures."

A women's organisation representative from Okehi LGA, interviewed on 1st October, 2026, observed that:

"Political parties should provide equal opportunities for male and female aspirants during candidate selection and electoral campaigns. However, party structures sometimes favour men because of the belief that male candidates have greater political influence and financial capacity. This situation can limit women's access to party support, political networks and elective positions. Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan's experience demonstrates the importance of making party processes more inclusive and transparent."

Table 6: **Perceived Effect of Institutional Discrimination on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's Legislative Participation (N = 380)**

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	Institutional discrimination affected Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's ability to participate effectively in Senate activities.	30	40	40	150	120	3.76	1.22	Accepted
2	Unequal treatment within the Senate limited Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's opportunity to exercise her legislative responsibilities.	35	40	45	140	120	3.71	1.27	Accepted
3	Institutional procedures and decisions placed restrictions on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's participation in legislative activities.	25	45	40	150	120	3.78	1.20	Accepted
4	The suspension of Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan affected her ability to contribute to legislative debates and proceedings.	20	35	35	150	140	3.93	1.14	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 6 presents respondents' views on the influence of institutional discrimination on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's legislative participation. The first item recorded a mean score of 3.76, indicating that institutional discrimination affected her ability to participate effectively in Senate activities. The second item recorded a mean score of 3.71, showing that unequal treatment within the Senate limited her opportunity to exercise her legislative responsibilities. The third item recorded a mean score of 3.78, indicating that institutional procedures and decisions placed restrictions on her participation in legislative activities. The fourth item recorded the highest mean score of 3.93, showing that her suspension affected her ability to contribute to legislative debates and proceedings. Since all four mean scores exceeded the criterion mean of 3.00, all the items were accepted.

A former political office holder from Okehi LGA, interviewed on 21st September, 2026, explained that:

> "Institutional discrimination can affect the ability of female politicians to perform their legislative responsibilities effectively, particularly in institutions where men dominate leadership positions. Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan's experience shows that women may encounter institutional obstacles even after successfully securing elective positions. Such challenges can limit their participation in Senate activities and reduce their influence in legislative processes."

A community leader from Ogori-Magongo LGA, interviewed on 23rd September, 2026, stated that:

> "Unequal treatment within political institutions can make it difficult for women to exercise the responsibilities attached to their elected positions. In the case of Senator Natasha, the controversies surrounding her relationship with the Senate leadership raised concerns about fairness, equal treatment and the ability of female senators to perform their duties without unnecessary restrictions. All elected representatives should be given equal opportunities to contribute to legislative activities."

A civil society organisation representative from Okene LGA, interviewed on 25th September, 2026, observed that:

> "The suspension of Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan affected her legislative participation because she could not attend Senate proceedings and contribute to debates during the period of suspension. Regardless of the reasons advanced by the Senate leadership, the absence of an elected representative reduces the opportunity for her constituents to have their interests presented during legislative deliberations. This makes fairness, transparency and accountability important in the application of legislative procedures."

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Table 7: **Perceived Effect of Political Intimidation and Harassment on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's Participation in Legislative Decision-Making (N = 380)**

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	Political intimidation and harassment discouraged Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan from freely expressing her views during legislative proceedings.	25	35	40	150	130	3.86	1.18	Accepted
2	Allegations of sexual harassment and the controversy surrounding them affected Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's participation in legislative activities.	20	35	45	145	135	3.89	1.14	Accepted
3	Political intimidation and harassment limited Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's ability to contribute freely to Senate debates and decision-making.	25	40	35	150	130	3.84	1.20	Accepted
4	The suspension of Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan restricted her participation in legislative deliberations and decision-making.	15	30	35	150	150	4.03	1.08	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 7 presents respondents' views on the effect of political intimidation and harassment on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's participation in legislative decision-making. The first item recorded a mean score of 3.86, indicating that political intimidation and harassment discouraged her from freely expressing her views during legislative proceedings. The second item recorded a mean score of 3.89, showing that the allegations of sexual harassment and the controversy surrounding them affected her participation in legislative activities. The third item recorded a mean score of 3.84, indicating that political intimidation and harassment limited her ability to contribute freely to Senate debates and decision-making. The fourth item recorded the highest mean score of 4.03, showing that her suspension restricted her participation in legislative deliberations and decision-making. Since all four mean scores exceeded the criterion mean of 3.00, all the items were accepted.

A political party stakeholder from Okene LGA, interviewed on 15th September, 2026, explained that:

> "Political intimidation and harassment can discourage women from expressing their opinions freely in legislative institutions. Female politicians often face criticism, threats and pressure from influential political actors, which may affect their confidence and freedom to participate in legislative proceedings. Senator Natasha's experience demonstrates some of the difficulties women encounter when expressing opposing views in a male-dominated political environment."

A women's political group leader from Adavi LGA, interviewed on 17th September, 2026, stated that:

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> "The sexual harassment allegations involving Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan and the controversy that followed affected her participation in legislative activities. Rather than concentrating on legislative responsibilities, attention shifted to disagreements surrounding gender relations, political authority and institutional conduct. Such controversies can place additional pressure on female politicians and affect their participation in political activities."

A political analyst from Ajaokuta LGA, interviewed on 19th September, 2026, observed that:

> "The suspension of Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan restricted her participation in legislative deliberations and decision-making during the period of suspension. As an elected representative, her absence from Senate proceedings limited her opportunity to contribute to debates, represent her constituents and influence legislative decisions. Disciplinary measures within legislative institutions should therefore be applied fairly and transparently to protect democratic representation."

Table 8: Effect of Gender Discrimination on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's Access to Elective Office (H_{01})

Variables	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	df	F	β	t	Sig.
Constant	0.642	0.412	0.410	(1,378)	264.74	-	25.918	0.000
Gender Discrimination	-	-	-	-	-	0.642	16.271	0.000

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Hypothesis one states that gender discrimination has no significant influence on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's access to elective office. The regression result indicates that gender discrimination significantly influences her access to elective office ($R = 0.642$, $R^2 = 0.412$, $\beta = 0.642$, $t = 16.271$, $p < 0.05$). The R^2 value indicates that gender discrimination explains 41.2% of the variation in access to elective office. The positive beta coefficient indicates that increased gender discrimination is associated with greater difficulties in accessing elective political positions. Since the relationship is statistically significant, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 9: Effect of Political Party Gatekeeping on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's Political Representation (H_{02})

Variables	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	df	F	β	t	Sig.
Constant	0.668	0.446	0.445	(1,378)	304.61	-	26.745	0.000
Political Party Gatekeeping	-	-	-	-	-	0.668	17.453	0.000

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Hypothesis two states that political party gatekeeping has no significant effect on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's political representation. The regression result indicates that political party gatekeeping significantly affects her political representation ($R = 0.668$, $R^2 = 0.446$, $\beta = 0.668$, $t = 17.453$, $p < 0.05$). The R^2 value shows that political party gatekeeping explains 44.6% of the variation in political representation. The positive beta coefficient indicates that increased party gatekeeping is associated with greater restrictions on her access to party nomination, internal decision-making processes, political support and representation. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

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Table 10: Effect of Institutional Discrimination on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's Legislative Participation (H_{03})

Variables	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	df	F	β	t	Sig.
Constant	0.691	0.477	0.475	(1,378)	345.16	-	28.331	0.000
Institutional Discrimination	-	-	-	-	-	0.691	18.579	0.000

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Hypothesis three states that institutional discrimination has no significant influence on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's legislative participation. The regression result reveals that institutional discrimination significantly influences her legislative participation ($R = 0.691$, $R^2 = 0.477$, $\beta = 0.691$, $t = 18.579$, $p < 0.05$). The R^2 value indicates that institutional discrimination explains 47.7% of the variation in legislative participation. The positive beta coefficient shows that increased institutional discrimination is associated with greater restrictions on her ability to participate in Senate activities, exercise legislative responsibilities and contribute to legislative debates and proceedings. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 11: Effect of Political Intimidation and Harassment on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's Participation in Legislative Decision-Making (H_{04})

Variables	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	df	F	β	t	Sig.
Constant	0.715	0.511	0.510	(1,378)	395.63	-	29.804	0.000
Political Intimidation and Harassment	-	-	-	-	-	0.715	19.891	0.000

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Hypothesis four states that political intimidation and harassment have no significant effect on Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's participation in legislative decision-making. The regression result indicates that political intimidation and harassment significantly affect her participation in legislative decision-making ($R = 0.715$, $R^2 = 0.511$, $\beta = 0.715$, $t = 19.891$, $p < 0.05$). The R^2 value shows that political intimidation and harassment explain 51.1% of the variation in legislative decision-making participation. The positive beta coefficient indicates that increased political intimidation and harassment are associated with greater restrictions on her freedom to express opinions, contribute to Senate debates and participate in legislative deliberations. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion of findings

The findings reveal that gender discrimination significantly influences Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's access to elective office. Women seeking elective positions in Nigeria continue to encounter barriers arising from patriarchal beliefs, gender stereotypes and unequal political opportunities. Political leadership is often perceived as a male-dominated responsibility, making women face additional scrutiny concerning their leadership abilities, personal lives and capacity to manage political affairs. These attitudes create difficulties for women in gaining public acceptance, mobilising political support and competing effectively with male politicians. The regression result confirms this relationship ($R = 0.642$, $R^2 = 0.412$, $\beta = 0.642$, $t = 16.271$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that gender discrimination explains 41.2% of the variation in access to elective office. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected. This finding agrees with Ette and Akpan-Obong (2023), who identified patriarchal structures and the masculinisation of politics as barriers to women's political participation, and Jacob et al. (2023)

highlighted cultural attitudes and systemic barriers to women's representation. Liberal Feminist Theory supports this finding by advocating equal political rights and opportunities and the removal of discriminatory practices. Addressing gender stereotypes and promoting equal political opportunities are therefore essential to improving women's access to elective office.

The findings establish that political party gatekeeping significantly affects Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's political representation. Political parties influence women's access to elective positions through nomination procedures, internal decision-making structures and the distribution of political support. However, powerful political actors, informal networks and established interests often influence party processes, making it difficult for women to secure nominations, obtain campaign support and participate in important decisions. The regression result confirms this relationship ($R = 0.668$, $R^2 = 0.446$, $\beta = 0.668$, $t = 17.453$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that political party gatekeeping explains 44.6% of the variation in political representation. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This finding agrees with Ette and Akpan-Obong (2023), who identified party gatekeepers and non-transparent nomination processes as obstacles to women's political participation. It also complements Pogoson (2012), who observed that patriarchal practices reinforce male dominance within political parties. Liberal Feminist Theory explains the situation through its emphasis on equal political opportunities and the removal of institutional barriers. Political parties should therefore strengthen internal democracy, ensure transparent nominations and provide equal opportunities for male and female aspirants.

The findings indicate that institutional discrimination significantly influences Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's legislative participation. Securing elective office does not automatically guarantee equal opportunities to exercise legislative responsibilities, particularly within institutions characterised by unequal power relations and gender inequalities. Institutional procedures, leadership arrangements and disciplinary decisions may restrict women's participation when applied unfairly. Senator Natasha's experience within the Senate, particularly the controversies surrounding her suspension, raises concerns about institutional fairness and the ability of elected women to contribute effectively to legislative activities. The regression result confirms this relationship ($R = 0.691$, $R^2 = 0.477$, $\beta = 0.691$, $t = 18.579$, $p < 0.05$), showing that institutional discrimination explains 47.7% of the variation in legislative participation. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected. This finding complements Popoola, Egharevba and Fayomi (2021), who highlighted gender inequalities in democratic governance and women's political rights, and Dan-Azumi and Asan (2021), who examined challenges affecting women's legislative representation in Nigeria. Liberal Feminist Theory supports equal treatment, legal protection and institutional opportunities irrespective of gender. Fair legislative procedures, institutional accountability and equal opportunities are therefore necessary to strengthen women's legislative participation.

The findings establish that political intimidation and harassment significantly affect Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's participation in legislative decision-making. Intimidation, threats, public hostility and political pressure can undermine women's freedom to express opinions and participate confidently in legislative activities. Gender stereotypes, personal attacks and attempts to question women's political legitimacy further create an unfavourable environment for political engagement. The controversies surrounding Senator Natasha, including the sexual harassment allegations and disagreements with the Senate leadership, illustrate the difficulties associated with gender relations and political authority within legislative institutions. The regression result confirms this relationship ($R = 0.715$, $R^2 = 0.511$, $\beta = 0.715$, $t = 19.891$, $p <$

0.05), indicating that political intimidation and harassment explain 51.1% of the variation in legislative decision-making participation. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This finding agrees with Ette and Akpan-Obong (2023), who identified bullying, intimidation and the politics of insult as challenges confronting women in Nigerian politics. It also complements Younis (2022), who discussed political violence and discriminatory practices affecting women's political participation. Liberal Feminist Theory reinforces the need for equal protection, freedom of political expression and opportunities for women to participate without intimidation. Legislative institutions should therefore establish effective protection mechanisms, ensure fair disciplinary procedures and promote an inclusive environment for women's participation in democratic decision-making.

Conclusion

The study concludes that gender discrimination, political party gatekeeping, institutional discrimination, and political intimidation and harassment significantly affect Senator Natasha Hadiza Akpoti-Uduaghan's political representation and legislative participation. The findings demonstrate that patriarchal beliefs, unequal political opportunities, restrictive party structures and unfair institutional practices create barriers that limit women's ability to access elective office, secure political support and perform their legislative responsibilities effectively. The experiences surrounding Senator Natasha further highlight the challenges women encounter even after securing electoral mandates. The study also establishes that intimidation and harassment can restrict women's freedom of expression and participation in legislative decision-making. These findings, supported by Liberal Feminist Theory, emphasise the need for equal political opportunities, transparent party processes, fair institutional procedures and effective protection against discrimination and harassment. Therefore, improving women's political representation in Nigeria requires deliberate efforts by political parties, legislative institutions and relevant stakeholders to promote gender equality, strengthen democratic participation and ensure that women enjoy the same political rights and opportunities as men.

Recommendations

i. Government and political stakeholders should address gender discrimination by promoting equal political opportunities for men and women and challenging patriarchal beliefs and stereotypes that discourage women from seeking elective office.
ii. Political parties should strengthen internal democracy by adopting transparent nomination procedures, ensuring fair distribution of campaign resources and preventing influential party members from unfairly restricting women's political representation.
iii. The National Assembly should ensure that legislative rules, disciplinary procedures and institutional decisions are applied fairly to all members, irrespective of gender, and provide equal opportunities for every legislator to perform their constitutional responsibilities.
iv. Legislative institutions should establish effective mechanisms for preventing and addressing political intimidation and harassment, protect female legislators from personal attacks and ensure that all elected representatives can freely express their views and participate in legislative decision-making.

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