

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN NIGERIA'S 9TH HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Abstract

Despite the constitutional guarantee of equal political rights in Nigeria, women's representation in the 9th House of Representatives remained extremely low, raising concerns about the effectiveness of democratic governance in promoting gender inclusion. This study examined the effect of democratic governance on women's representation in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives, with specific focus on inclusiveness, equality, political participation, descriptive representation, and legislative participation. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The population comprised 547 respondents, including members of the House of Representatives, legislative aides, National Assembly Service Commission staff, National Orientation Agency officials, and selected women-focused civil society groups and media practitioners. A sample size of 277 was determined using Yamane statistical technique with an added 20% margin of safety, and stratified sampling technique was used to ensure proportional representation of all stakeholder groups. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires, while data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis with SPSS version 27. Reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, while content validity was ensured through expert review. Findings revealed that inclusiveness and equality had a significant positive effect on descriptive representation of women, while political participation significantly influenced legislative participation. The study concluded that democratic governance significantly shaped both the numerical presence and active involvement of women in the legislature. It recommended stronger inclusive policies within political parties and increased civic engagement programmes to enhance women's political participation and legislative effectiveness.

Keywords: *Democratic Governance, Women's Representation, Inclusiveness, Equality, Political Participation, Nigeria, House of Representatives.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Democratic governance is currently regarded as one of the most widespread forms of organisation of political authority and public decision-making in contemporary nations. Its appeal is not limited to the conduct of periodic elections but to broader values of involvement, inclusion, accountability, equality and responsiveness. In both developed and developing democracies, the quality of governance is increasingly judged by the ability of political institutions to accommodate social groups with different identities and to generate equal opportunities for representation. In recent years, the international conversation on democratic consolidation has evolved beyond the simple arithmetic of electoral results to encompass whether governance architectures truly mirror the interests and aspirations of marginalised communities, particularly women. Despite considerable progress globally, gender inequality in political representation continues, and it is not clear how far democratic regimes can meet their normative responsibility to equality and inclusive citizenry (Adesoye et al., 2025; Salaudeen, 2025).

In this sense, democratic governance may be seen as a system of political administration that is based on public engagement, inclusion, equality before the law, transparency and institutional accountability. Democratic governance is not only about the procedures, it is also about creating an environment in which all segments of society can participate actively in political processes and decision making. For women, this framework is particularly important since it provides means by which past impediments to political participation can be addressed and decreased. Two characteristics of democratic governance that are particularly pertinent to women's representation are inclusion and equality and political involvement. Inclusiveness and equality refer to the degree to which voting systems and governance processes, and political institutions, provide equal chances regardless of gender. Where these ideas are established in democratic institutions, women are more likely to attain elective posts and leadership positions. Political participation, on the other hand, refers to the active engagement of the population in political activities including voting, campaigning, party membership, political advocacy and electoral contestation. Increased chances for women to participate in these processes may enhance their visibility and influence in representative institutions (Salau et al., 2024; Adesoye et al., 2025).

Women's representation has also become a major issue in discussions of democratic government, as legislatures are supposed to reflect the demographic mix and interests of their

people. In the Nigerian context however, women's representation in elective posts has been relatively low during almost two decades of unbroken democratic administration. This issue is better understood in the framework of the 9th House of Representatives started in 2019, which is at once the success and the limits of women's political inclusion in the Fourth Republic. We can analyse women's representation in terms of descriptive representation and legislative involvement. Descriptive representation refers to the number of women in legislatures and the degree to which elected officials reflect the gender composition of the society. Legislative participation, in contrast, refers to the substantive involvement of female legislators in parliamentary debates, committee assignments, policy creation, oversight activities and legislative decision-making. Numerical representation is important but active participation in the legislative process is also important to influence governance outcomes and promote gender responsive policies (Ajose, 2024; Oluwaleye et al., 2024).

The nexus between democratic governance and women's representation in the 9th House of Representatives of Nigeria is intricate and dynamic.

Democratic institutions, on the one hand, provide formal avenues for women's inclusion through electoral competition and constitutional guarantees of political rights. But prevailing socio-cultural norms, party structures and disparities of resources may constrain the extent to which these chances translate into meaningful representation. Hence, it is still relevant to investigate if more inclusivity and equality, together with higher political involvement, are connected with better descriptive representation and legislative participation of women in the 9th House of Representatives. Such question further contributes to the continuous discussions on the quality of Nigeria's democracy and the degree to which democratic governance may generate expanded female inclusion within legislative institutions.

Statement of the Problem

Democratic governance was built on the principles of inclusiveness, equality and active political participation, where all strata of society were supposed to have equal opportunities to influence public decision-making and occupy representative positions. In democratic systems this diversity was to be reflected by the legislative institutions in the population they served and the interests, perspectives and concerns of both men and women in their governance processes. In this context, women's participation was seen as not just a numbers game but

rather a critical aspect of democratic legitimacy, accountability and inclusive development (Adesoye et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, the representation of women in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives was very low despite these expectations. Of the 360 seats in the House of Representatives inaugurated in 2019, only 13 were held by women, or about 3.6 per cent of the membership. The ratio was among the lowest in the world and well below international standards for greater representation of women in political institutions. This was the case even in the face of the constitutional guarantee of equal political rights, the growing demand for gender inclusiveness and the country's unbroken democratic journey since 1999. Hence, there were concerns on whether democratic governance had translated into meaningful opportunities for women's electoral success and legislative participation in Nigerian political system (Ajose, 2024; Salaudeen, 2025).

Empirically, the majority of the literature has focused on women's political participation, gender inequality, electoral challenges and women's representation in the wider Nigerian democratic landscape (Salau et al., 2024; Tukura & Suleiman, 2024). These findings are intriguing and beneficial; yet, there remains a deficiency of scholarly study regarding the impact of diverse aspects of democratic governance, such as inclusivity, equality, and political engagement, on women's representation in the 9th House of Representatives. Furthermore, previous research has frequently seen democratic governance and women's representation as distinct entities, rather than exploring their interconnection. The gap guided the current study on democratic governance and women's involvement in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. To what extent does inclusiveness and equality influence descriptive representation of women in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives?
- ii. How does political participation influence legislative participation of women in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives?

Research Objectives

The broad objective of this study is to examine the effect of democratic governance on women's representation in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the effect of inclusiveness and equality on descriptive representation of women in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives.
- ii. Determine the effect of political participation on legislative participation of women in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated for the study:

H₀₁: Inclusiveness and equality have no significant effect on descriptive representation of women in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives.

H₀₂: Inclusiveness and equality have a significant effect on descriptive representation of women in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

Democratic Governance

Democratic governance refers to a system of governing in which public authority is exercised through institutions and processes that uphold participation, inclusiveness, accountability, transparency, equality, and respect for fundamental rights. Unlike traditional notions of democracy that focused primarily on electoral competition, contemporary democratic governance extends to the quality of interactions between citizens and institutions as well as the responsiveness of government to societal demands. The concept has gained increasing prominence in governance literature because it provides a framework for evaluating not only how leaders are selected but also how political power is exercised and distributed among

different groups within society (Adesoye et al., 2025). Democratic governance therefore embodies both procedural and substantive dimensions of democracy, seeking to ensure that governance outcomes reflect the collective interests of citizens rather than the preferences of a privileged minority.

From a gender perspective, democratic governance is often associated with the creation of opportunities that enable women and other historically marginalised groups to participate in political processes on equal terms with men. In many democratic societies, reforms aimed at strengthening inclusiveness, equality, and citizen participation have been linked with improvements in women's political visibility and access to elective offices. Nevertheless, the existence of democratic institutions alone does not automatically guarantee gender-balanced representation. In countries such as Nigeria, democratic governance has coexisted with structural barriers rooted in culture, economic inequality, and party politics, creating a situation in which formal democratic rights may not always translate into equitable political outcomes for women (Vande, 2025). Consequently, democratic governance remains both a normative ideal and an analytical lens through which the quality of women's representation can be examined.

Inclusiveness and Equality

Inclusiveness and equality constitute one of the central pillars of democratic governance. Inclusiveness refers to the extent to which governance systems provide opportunities for all social groups to participate in political, economic, and social decision-making processes. Equality, on the other hand, concerns the fair and non-discriminatory treatment of citizens regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status. Together, these principles seek to eliminate barriers that restrict participation and representation within public institutions. According to Adesoye et al. (2025), democratic systems that prioritise inclusiveness and equality tend to foster broader participation and stronger legitimacy because citizens perceive governance structures as fair and accessible.

Within the context of women's political representation, inclusiveness and equality are particularly relevant because they challenge traditional patterns of exclusion that have historically limited women's access to political power. Although Nigeria's constitutional framework guarantees equal political rights, women continue to encounter obstacles associated with patriarchal norms, financial constraints, and unequal access to party structures. As a result,

debates concerning democratic governance increasingly focus on whether governance institutions genuinely create equal opportunities for women's participation and representation. Where inclusiveness and equality are effectively promoted, women are more likely to secure nominations, contest elections successfully, and occupy influential positions within legislative institutions (Tukura & Suleiman, 2024).

Political Participation

Political participation refers to the involvement of citizens in activities intended to influence political decisions, governance processes, and the selection of public office holders. Such participation may occur through voting, membership of political parties, political campaigns, advocacy activities, public consultations, and electoral contestation. Contemporary democratic governance places considerable emphasis on political participation because active citizen engagement strengthens accountability and enhances the legitimacy of political institutions. Salau et al. (2024) argued that political participation represents one of the most visible indicators of democratic vitality since it reflects the extent to which citizens are able and willing to contribute to public affairs.

The relevance of political participation to women's representation becomes evident when examining pathways through which women enter political office. Political participation often serves as a foundation for leadership development, political networking, and electoral visibility. Women who actively engage in political activities are more likely to acquire the experience, resources, and support required for successful electoral competition. Yet participation remains uneven across gender groups in many developing democracies. In Nigeria, women's political participation has frequently been constrained by cultural expectations, limited financial resources, political violence, and exclusionary party practices. These challenges have continued to influence the extent to which women translate political engagement into legislative representation and meaningful participation in governance processes (Ari et al., 2025).

Women's Representation

Women's representation refers to the extent to which women occupy positions within political institutions and contribute to public decision-making processes. The concept emerged from broader debates concerning democratic legitimacy and social justice, particularly the argument that elected bodies should reflect the demographic composition of the populations they

represent. Women's representation extends beyond numerical presence and encompasses the capacity of female representatives to influence policy outcomes, advocate gender-sensitive interests, and participate effectively in governance. As democratic societies become increasingly attentive to issues of diversity and inclusion, women's representation has become an important measure of democratic maturity and institutional responsiveness (Oluwaleye et al., 2024).

In Nigeria, women's representation has remained a recurring issue despite decades of democratic governance. Although women constitute nearly half of the country's population, their presence within legislative institutions has remained disproportionately low. The 9th House of Representatives illustrated this imbalance, with women occupying only a small fraction of available seats. This disparity has generated concerns regarding the inclusiveness of Nigeria's democratic system and the extent to which governance structures accommodate women's voices in policy formulation and legislative decision-making. Consequently, women's representation has become a significant area of scholarly inquiry within governance and political studies (Salaudeen, 2025).

Descriptive Representation

Descriptive representation refers to the numerical presence of women within elected political institutions. The concept is based on the assumption that representative bodies should mirror the demographic characteristics of the populations they serve. In this sense, the proportion of women occupying legislative positions becomes an indicator of inclusiveness and democratic fairness. Scholars have argued that descriptive representation matters because individuals who share common social experiences may possess greater awareness of issues affecting their constituencies and are therefore more likely to articulate those concerns within governance processes (Ajose, 2024).

Beyond symbolism, descriptive representation carries practical implications for political legitimacy and public confidence. When women are visibly represented in legislative institutions, citizens may perceive governance systems as more inclusive and responsive. However, numerical representation alone does not necessarily guarantee substantive influence. Critics have argued that women may be present in legislative institutions yet remain marginalised within decision-making processes due to structural constraints or limited access

to leadership positions. Nevertheless, descriptive representation remains a fundamental starting point for assessing women's political inclusion and democratic governance outcomes.

Legislative Participation

Legislative participation refers to the active involvement of elected representatives in the formal functions of lawmaking, oversight, debate, committee work, and policy formulation. For female legislators, participation extends beyond occupying seats within parliament to engaging meaningfully in legislative activities and influencing governance outcomes. The concept recognises that effective representation requires both presence and active contribution. Chukwudi et al. (2024) observed that legislative participation enables representatives to shape policy agendas, advocate constituency interests, and contribute to democratic accountability.

In relation to women, legislative participation serves as an important indicator of political empowerment and institutional inclusion. Female legislators who actively engage in parliamentary processes can influence debates on education, healthcare, gender equality, social protection, and broader developmental issues. Nevertheless, participation may be affected by institutional hierarchies, party dynamics, and societal perceptions regarding women's leadership capabilities. Within Nigeria's legislative environment, understanding the extent of women's participation remains critical because it provides insight into whether increased representation translates into meaningful engagement and policy influence within democratic governance structures (Frederick & Israel, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Critical Mass Theory, originally developed by the political scientist and sociologist, Rosabeth Moss Kanter in 1977. Although the theory was initially formulated to explain the experiences of minority groups within organisations, it has subsequently been adapted to the study of women's political representation and democratic governance. The theory argues that when the numerical presence of a minority group reaches a certain threshold or "critical mass," members of that group are more likely to influence institutional culture, decision-making processes, and policy outcomes. In political settings, the theory suggests that increased representation of women can enhance their collective influence within legislative institutions and strengthen the responsiveness of governance systems to gender-related concerns.

The major assumption of Critical Mass Theory is that numerical representation matters because it shapes the capacity of women to participate effectively and exert influence within political institutions. According to the theory, a very small number of women in legislative bodies may struggle to challenge dominant norms or advance policy priorities due to isolation and limited bargaining power. However, as women's numbers increase, opportunities for coalition building, agenda setting, and policy influence also increase. This assumption has made the theory particularly relevant in discussions concerning democratic governance and gender inclusion.

Despite its popularity, the theory has attracted criticism from scholars who argue that numerical presence alone does not necessarily result in substantive influence. Critics contend that institutional culture, party ideology, leadership structures, and socio-political contexts may be more important than numbers in determining women's effectiveness within legislative institutions. Some studies have shown that even where women constitute a significant proportion of legislative members, structural barriers may continue to limit their influence over policy outcomes.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, Critical Mass Theory possesses notable strengths. It provides a clear explanation for why numerical representation remains an important aspect of democratic governance and offers a useful framework for analysing the relationship between inclusion and political influence. The theory also draws attention to the broader institutional consequences of gender imbalance within representative bodies and highlights the need for more inclusive governance structures.

The theory is applicable to this study because it explains how democratic governance, particularly through inclusiveness and equality as well as political participation, may enhance women's representation within Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives. The theory suggests that governance systems that create equitable opportunities for participation are more likely to increase women's descriptive representation and strengthen their legislative participation. Consequently, Critical Mass Theory provides an appropriate framework for understanding the relationship between democratic governance and women's representation within the Nigerian legislative context.

Empirical Review

Vande (2025) examined the relationship between democratic governance and the reality of women's participation and representation in Nigerian politics between 1999 and 2023, with a focus on national-level political inclusion trends in Nigeria. The study was conducted in Nigeria and adopted a quantitative descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised political office holders, party officials, and women political aspirants across selected states, although the exact population size was not explicitly stated in the study. A sample size was drawn using stratified and purposive sampling techniques to ensure representation of key political actors. Data were collected primarily through secondary sources, including electoral records, INEC reports, and policy documents, while interviews were used as a supplementary primary source in some cases. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics and trend analysis. The findings revealed that despite democratic consolidation, women's representation remained significantly low due to structural, cultural, and institutional barriers within political parties and electoral systems. The study recommended gender quota implementation, party-level reforms, and strengthened legal frameworks to enhance women's political inclusion. However, it was limited by its heavy reliance on secondary data and the lack of granular constituency-level analysis.

Afolabi (2019) investigated the invisibility of women's organizations in decision-making processes and governance in Nigeria, aiming to understand how gendered exclusion affects policy influence. The study was carried out in Nigeria and employed a qualitative case study research design. The population included women-led civil society organizations, policymakers, and governance institutions, although no fixed population size was specified. A purposive sampling technique was used to select key informants and relevant organizations. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and document analysis of policy engagement records. The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The findings showed that women's organizations were largely excluded from formal governance structures and were often relegated to consultative rather than decision-making roles. The study recommended institutional inclusion of women's groups in governance frameworks and stronger advocacy networks. Its limitation was the small qualitative sample, which restricted generalizability beyond the selected cases.

Linda and Pius (2021) examined women in politics and their implications for the credibility of future democratic governance, focusing on how gender inclusion shapes democratic

legitimacy. The study was conducted in Nigeria using a mixed-methods research design. The population consisted of political actors, voters, and civil society stakeholders, with a sample drawn using stratified random sampling. The sample size was not explicitly provided but was distributed across selected geopolitical zones. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and key informant interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis, while qualitative responses were analyzed thematically. The study found that increased women's participation in politics significantly enhanced perceived democratic credibility and trust in governance institutions. It recommended the institutionalization of gender-inclusive policies and increased political mentorship for women. The limitation of the study was the inconsistency in political participation data across regions, which affected comparative analysis.

Popoola et al. (2021) assessed the relationship between democratic governance, gender, and women's rights in Nigeria from 1999 to 2019, with the objective of examining how governance structures affected gender equality outcomes. The study was conducted in Nigeria and adopted a longitudinal descriptive research design. The population included national governance institutions, legal frameworks, and gender advocacy reports. Secondary data constituted the major source of data collection, drawn from government publications, international reports, and policy databases. Data were analyzed using content analysis and trend comparison techniques. The findings revealed that democratic governance in Nigeria had not sufficiently translated into improved women's rights, despite policy commitments to gender equality. The study recommended stronger enforcement of gender-sensitive legislation and increased accountability mechanisms. Its limitation was the reliance on secondary data, which limited real-time validation of governance practices.

Salau et al. (2024) critically assessed women and political participation in Nigeria and explored pathways for improving inclusion in democratic governance. The study was conducted in Nigeria using a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised women politicians, party members, and electorate groups, with a sample selected using purposive and random sampling techniques. Data were collected using questionnaires and interviews. Data analysis was conducted using frequency distributions and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that women's political participation remained constrained by socio-cultural norms, financial barriers, and party discrimination. The study recommended affirmative action policies, political financing support for women, and civic education campaigns. The limitation

of the study was the uneven representation of rural women in the sampled population, which affected balance in responses.

Idike et al. (2020) examined the relationship between gender, democracy, and national development in Nigeria, with the aim of determining how gender inclusion influenced governance outcomes. The study was conducted in Nigeria and adopted a correlational survey research design. The population included government institutions, civil society organizations, and the general electorate. A sample size was selected using multistage sampling techniques. Data were collected through structured questionnaires. The data analysis involved regression analysis and descriptive statistics. The findings showed a positive relationship between gender inclusion and national development indicators, although women remained underrepresented in governance structures. The study recommended institutional reforms to enhance gender equality in political participation. Its limitation was its focus on macro-level data, which did not capture constituency-level dynamics.

Adeogun and Isola (2020) studied democratic governance and women's political participation in Nigeria, aiming to evaluate how governance structures influenced women's engagement in politics. The study was conducted in Nigeria using a descriptive survey design. The population consisted of political party members, electoral officers, and women groups. A sample was drawn using stratified sampling techniques. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that weak democratic institutions and patriarchal party structures limited women's political participation. The study recommended strengthening internal party democracy and implementing gender quotas. The limitation was the limited geographic coverage, which restricted national representativeness.

Adesoye et al. (2025) examined gender bias and its implications for democratic governance and sustainable development in Nigeria. The study was conducted across selected African democratic states with a focus on Nigeria. It adopted a comparative qualitative research design. The population included governance experts, policymakers, and gender advocacy organizations. A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents. Data were collected through interviews and document analysis. Thematic analysis was used for data interpretation. The findings showed that gender bias significantly undermined governance effectiveness and sustainable development outcomes. The study recommended gender

mainstreaming in governance and institutional restructuring. Its limitation was the comparative scope, which limited depth of Nigeria-specific analysis.

Tukura and Suleiman (2024) investigated patriarchal politics and women's representation in governance in Nigeria between 1999 and 2023. The study was conducted in Nigeria using a qualitative exploratory design. The population included political elites, party officials, and women in politics. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. Data were collected through interviews and documentary analysis. The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The findings revealed that patriarchal party structures and cultural norms significantly hindered women's political representation. The study recommended legal reforms and political restructuring to reduce patriarchal dominance. Its limitation was the subjective nature of qualitative interpretation.

Adesoye et al. (2025) examined re-emerging inclusive governance and gender imbalance in political representation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The study adopted a historical and comparative research design conducted in Nigeria and selected African countries. The population consisted of governance reports, political data, and policy analysts. Secondary data sources were used extensively. Data were analyzed through comparative thematic analysis. The findings indicated slow but emerging progress toward inclusive governance, although gender imbalance remained persistent. The study recommended sustained policy enforcement and institutional reforms. Its limitation was reliance on historical data without real-time validation.

Literature Gaps

Despite the growing body of literature on democratic governance and women's political representation in Nigeria, several critical gaps remain evident. First, most existing studies (e.g., Vande, 2025; Popoola et al., 2021; Adeogun & Isola, 2020) have focused broadly on national democratic trends or women's political participation without isolating specific legislative periods such as the 9th House of Representatives, thereby limiting context-specific insights. Second, a significant proportion of studies emphasized general women's participation and rights while paying limited attention to the institutional mechanisms of democratic governance, particularly how specific dimensions such as inclusiveness, equality, and political participation directly translate into measurable legislative outcomes for women. Third, many empirical works adopted either qualitative or secondary data approaches (e.g., Afolabi, 2019; Adesoye et al., 2025), which restrict causal inference and limit statistical testing of relationships between

governance variables and representation outcomes. Fourth, there is a noticeable methodological gap in integrating descriptive representation and legislative participation as dual dependent constructs, as most studies treat women's representation as a single aggregated concept rather than a multidimensional outcome. Finally, existing literature has insufficiently examined how governance quality within the legislative arm specifically influences women's effectiveness beyond mere numerical presence, creating a conceptual and empirical gap that this study addresses by linking democratic governance dimensions directly to both descriptive and legislative participation outcomes in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design as it enabled data collection from respondents at one point in time and was considered appropriate for the study of the effect of democratic governance on the representation of women in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives. The choice of design is justified by the fact that it allowed the collection of views from various stakeholders directly involved in the legislative and governance processes and also provided for statistical analysis of the relationships among the study's variables. The study population was made up of 547 respondents: 360 members of the 9th House of Representatives, 58 legislative aides, 51 staff of the National Assembly Service Commission, 23 officials of the National Orientation Agency (NOA), 15 members of the Women's Christians Association of Nigeria (WOCAN), 14 members of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), 15 members of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), and 11 media practitioners. The sample size was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula, $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$, where $N = 547$ and $e = 0.05$; thus, $n = \frac{547}{1+547(0.05)^2} = \frac{547}{2.3675} = 231$. To provide better representativeness, a margin of safety of 20% (46 respondents) was added to the sample size to accommodate for possible non-response, attrition and incomplete questionnaire. This gave a total sample size of 277 respondents. Stratified sampling was adopted since the population consisted of several stakeholder groups and it was important to include these groups in proportion to ensure that the responses were balanced and unbiased. Primary data were collected with the use of structured questionnaire given to the respondents. The validity of the instrument was determined by the content validity, where the questionnaire was examined by experts in political science and research technique, and reliability was determined using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. The internal consistency for the reliability results was found to be acceptable for Inclusiveness and Equality ($\alpha = 0.83$),

Political Participation ($\alpha = 0.86$), Descriptive Representation ($\alpha = 0.81$), and Legislative Participation ($\alpha = 0.88$) (see Table 3.1). Data were examined using SPSS Version 27 utilising regression analysis. The models estimated were: $DR = \beta_0 + \beta_1 IE + \mu$ for Hypothesis One, where Descriptive Representation (DR) was regressed on Inclusiveness and Equality (IE), and $LP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PP + \mu$ for Hypothesis Two, where Legislative Participation (LP) was regressed on Political Participation (PP).

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Inclusiveness and Equality	0.83
Political Participation	0.86
Descriptive Representation	0.81
Legislative Participation	0.88
Overall Average	0.85

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 2: Administered Questionnaire

	Number	Percentage
Questionnaire Distributed	277	100%
Returned Questionnaire	253	91%
Unreturned Questionnaire	24	9%

Source: Field Survey, (2026)

Table 2 presented the response rate of the administered questionnaire used for data collection in the study. Out of the 277 copies of questionnaire distributed to respondents across the various strata, 253 were correctly completed and returned, representing 91% of the total distribution, while 24 copies of questionnaire were not returned, accounting for 9%. The high return rate indicated a strong level of respondent engagement and willingness to participate in the study, which enhanced the credibility and reliability of the data collected. This response rate also suggested that the sampling frame was well-accessed and that the respondents possessed adequate interest and relevance to the subject matter of democratic governance and women's representation in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives. Consequently, the minimal level of non-response reduced the risk of non-response bias and strengthened the generalizability and validity of the study findings.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: Inclusiveness and equality have no significant effect on descriptive representation of women in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives.

$$DR = \beta_0 + \beta_1 IE + \mu \dots\dots\dots 1$$

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.677 ^a	.458	.456	.2945

a. Predictors: (Constant), IE

Source: SPSS Output Version 27.0

Table 3 revealed that the regression model demonstrated a moderate explanatory power in assessing the relationship between inclusiveness and equality (IE) and descriptive representation (DR) of women in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives. The R value of 0.677 indicated a strong positive relationship between the variables, while the R-square value of 0.458 showed that approximately 45.8% of the variation in descriptive representation was explained by inclusiveness and equality. The adjusted R-square of 0.456 further confirmed the robustness of the model after controlling for degrees of freedom, indicating that the model had good explanatory relevance. This implied that inclusiveness and equality played a substantial role in determining the level of women's descriptive representation, while the remaining 54.2% variation was explained by other external factors not captured in the model, thereby strengthening the need for further exploration of additional determinants.

Table 4: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	18.390	1	18.390	212.110	.000 ^b
	Residual	21.762	251	.087		
	Total	40.152	252			

a. Dependent Variable: DR

b. Predictors: (Constant), IE

Source: SPSS Output Version 27.0

Table 4 showed that the overall regression model was statistically significant in explaining the relationship between inclusiveness and equality and women's descriptive representation. The F-statistic value of 212.110 with a significance value of 0.000 indicated that the model was highly significant at the 0.05 level, thereby rejecting the null hypothesis. This implied that inclusiveness and equality jointly had a statistically significant effect on descriptive representation of women in the 9th House of Representatives. The implication of this finding was that improvements in inclusiveness and equality within democratic governance structures significantly enhanced the numerical presence of women in legislative positions, confirming that the observed relationship was not due to chance but reflected a real underlying effect.

Table 5: Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.674	.142		18.841	.000
	IE	.585	.040	.677	14.564	.000

a. Dependent Variable: DR

Source: SPSS Output Version 27.0

Table 5 showed that inclusiveness and equality (IE) had a positive and statistically significant effect on descriptive representation (DR), with an unstandardized beta coefficient (B) of 0.585 and a t-value of 14.564 at a significance level of 0.000. This indicated that a one-unit increase in inclusiveness and equality led to a 0.585 increase in descriptive representation of women in the 9th House of Representatives, holding other factors constant. The standardized beta value of 0.677 further confirmed that inclusiveness and equality had a strong predictive influence on descriptive representation. The implication of this result was that strengthening inclusiveness and equality mechanisms within democratic governance structures significantly improved women's numerical representation in legislative offices. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H01) was rejected, confirming that inclusiveness and equality had a significant effect on descriptive representation of women in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives.

Hypothesis Two:

H02: Inclusiveness and equality have a significant effect on descriptive representation of women in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives.

$$LP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PP + \mu \dots\dots\dots 2$$

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.553 ^a	.306	.303	.2823

a. Predictors: (Constant), PP

Source: SPSS Output Version 27.0

Table 6 indicated that the regression model showed a moderate explanatory relationship between political participation (PP) and legislative participation (LP) of women in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives. The R value of 0.553 revealed a moderate positive relationship between the variables, while the R-square value of 0.306 showed that approximately 30.6% of the variation in legislative participation was explained by political participation. The adjusted R-square value of 0.303 further confirmed the stability and reliability of the model after

adjustment for degrees of freedom. This implied that political participation had a meaningful but not exclusive influence on legislative participation, while about 69.4% of the variation was influenced by other institutional, structural, and contextual factors not captured in the model.

Table 7: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8.827	1	8.827	110.754	.000 ^b
	Residual	20.005	251	.080		
	Total	28.833	252			

a. Dependent Variable: LP

b. Predictors: (Constant), PP

Source: SPSS Output Version 27.0

Table 7 showed that the overall regression model was statistically significant in explaining the relationship between political participation and legislative participation. The F-statistic value of 110.754 with a significance level of 0.000 indicated that the model was highly significant at the 5% level. This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis and confirmed that political participation had a statistically significant effect on legislative participation of women in the 9th House of Representatives. The implication of this finding was that increased political participation within democratic governance structures significantly improved women's involvement in legislative processes, confirming that participation mechanisms were critical drivers of effective representation.

Table 8: Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.195	.164		13.409	.000
	PP	.553	.053	.553	10.524	.000

a. Dependent Variable: LP

Source: SPSS Output Version 27.0

Table 8 showed that political participation (PP) had a positive and statistically significant effect on legislative participation (LP), with an unstandardized beta coefficient (B) of 0.553 and a t-value of 10.524 at a significance level of 0.000. This indicated that a one-unit increase in political participation led to a 0.553 increase in legislative participation, holding other factors constant. The standardized beta value of 0.553 further confirmed a moderate-to-strong predictive influence of political participation on legislative participation. This implied that enhanced engagement of women in political activities such as party involvement, campaigns, and advocacy significantly translated into higher levels of legislative participation within the 9th House of Representatives. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming a significant effect of political participation on legislative participation of women.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first hypothesis (H01) stated that inclusiveness and equality had no significant effect on the descriptive representation of women in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives, while the empirical result revealed that inclusiveness and equality had a positive and statistically significant effect on descriptive representation ($\beta = 0.585$, $p = 0.000$). This finding indicated that the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming that improvements in inclusiveness and equality within democratic governance structures significantly enhanced women's numerical representation in the legislature. This outcome was consistent with the arguments of Critical Mass Theory, which posits that increased access and equitable inclusion of minority groups in political structures improves their visibility and presence in decision-making spaces. The result was strongly supported by Linda and Pius (2021), who found that gender-inclusive political environments significantly improved women's visibility and credibility in governance, and Salau et al. (2024), who reported that inclusiveness and equality were key drivers of women's political participation in Nigeria. Similarly, Idike et al. (2020) affirmed that gender-inclusive governance structures positively influenced representation outcomes. However, the findings contrasted with Popoola et al. (2021) and Afolabi (2019), who argued that formal inclusiveness often failed to translate into actual representation due to structural and cultural constraints within political systems. This contradiction suggests that while inclusiveness exists in principle, its effectiveness may vary depending on institutional enforcement and socio-political

context. The empirical evidence therefore partially antagonized earlier studies that downplayed the direct impact of inclusiveness, while strongly supporting those that linked it to improved representation outcomes.

The second hypothesis (H02) stated that inclusiveness and equality had a significant effect on descriptive representation of women in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives, and the empirical result also confirmed a significant positive relationship between inclusiveness and equality and descriptive representation. This reinforced the rejection of the null hypothesis and further strengthened the argument that inclusive democratic governance structures directly improved women's numerical presence in the legislature. The finding aligned strongly with Adeogun and Isola (2020), who established that democratic governance mechanisms that promote equality significantly enhance women's political participation, and with Tukura and Suleiman (2024), who emphasized that reducing patriarchal barriers within political institutions increases women's representation. In addition, Adesoye et al. (2025) supported this outcome by arguing that inclusive governance reforms are central to addressing gender imbalance in African political systems. The result was also theoretically grounded in Critical Mass Theory, which explains that when institutional conditions allow women to attain a certain level of inclusion, their numerical presence increases, strengthening their visibility and political influence. However, Vande (2025) and Popoola et al. (2021) provided a contrasting perspective by arguing that despite formal inclusiveness, women remain underrepresented due to entrenched party structures and socio-cultural barriers, suggesting that inclusiveness alone may not guarantee substantive improvement. These contrasting findings partially antagonized the present study, although the statistical evidence from this research indicated that inclusiveness and equality still played a significant and measurable role in shaping descriptive representation within the 9th House of Representatives.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that democratic governance had a significant effect on women's representation in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives. Specifically, inclusiveness and equality were found to have a positive and statistically significant influence on the descriptive representation of women, indicating that improved access, fairness, and equal political opportunities enhanced the numerical presence of women in the legislature. In addition,

political participation was also found to significantly influence legislative participation of women, showing that increased engagement in political activities translated into more active involvement of female legislators in lawmaking and governance processes. Overall, the findings confirmed that democratic governance structures played a crucial role in shaping both the presence and effectiveness of women in Nigeria's legislative system, consistent with the expectations of Critical Mass Theory.

Recommendations

1. Government and electoral stakeholders should deepen policies that promote inclusiveness and equality by reducing structural and financial barriers that limit women's access to elective positions. Political parties should adopt transparent nomination processes and implement gender-sensitive reforms that guarantee fair competition, thereby improving women's descriptive representation in legislative institutions.
2. There should be deliberate efforts by political parties, civil society organizations, and the National Orientation Agency to increase women's political participation through leadership training, civic education, and mentorship programmes. This will strengthen women's capacity to actively engage in legislative duties, thereby improving their substantive participation and overall influence in governance processes.

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