

Gender, religion and politics: a qualitative analysis on the role of women to a sustainable quality of work-life (QWL)

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Olayombo Elizabeth Akinwale
*Department of History and Strategic Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos,
Lagos, Nigeria, and*

Olusegun Emmanuel Akinwale and Owolabi Lateef Kuye
*Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences,
University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria*

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Abstract

Purpose – Employability skills have transformed from the acquisition of university degrees to possessions of cognate skills other than only degrees that can help employees secure employment in contemporary work environments. This study evaluates essential skills that will prepare millennia of youths and graduates for employment in the present job market. The study investigated four major hypotheses to underscore the employability opportunities of graduates in challenging 21st-century work environments.

Design/methodology/approach – To clearly gain an understanding of women's disparity in society, the study employed a qualitative approach to evaluate the incidence of gender prejudice in a men's dominant world. The study utilised two distinguished sampling strategies, purposive and snowballing sampling techniques, which were deemed suitable and useful due to the nature of the study. The study recruited 42 participants by conducting semi-structured interview sessions for the study. The study employed a deductive approach to analyse the data obtained from participants. A thematic content analysis was used to take away prejudice and establish an overarching impression of the interviewed data. Atlas.ti was used to analyse the transcribed interview data from the participants to establish common themes from the surveyed informants.

Findings – The results of this investigation indicated that there is a deep-rooted trend of institutionalised men's dominance in politics and religious leadership. Women perceived less representation and men dominated the two domains of existence in their local environment. The study established that women are optimistic about a turnaround narrative on gender equality in politics and religious leadership. They expressed their concern about strengthened public debate and campaigns on women's representation, and against gender discrimination. The study further shows that women are influencing the ethical and moral sense for change against women's neglect in society. They expressed their concerns against the selection of people into political offices for elected political posts and observed the peculiarity of political godfathers fixing their favourite men into those offices.

Originality/value – The study discovered that women are leading campaigns for their representation in politics as well as church leadership today. The novelty of this study bothering around two domains of women's lives – politics and religion, in particular, church leadership. These have not been evidence before in a study.

Keywords Gender equality, Religion, Politics, Women empowerment, Women's status, Quality of work-life, Qualitative analysis, Local government, Lagos State

Paper type Research paper

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1. Introduction

The positions and roles of women in society are one of the themes that have provoked international scholarly attention, especially in the gender literature. In economic, social, political and religious spheres, women's status and roles have been described in a variety of ways. However, religion, in addition to customary and conventional regulations, appears to have the most significant impact on men's and women's relationships (Schnabel *et al.*, 2022). Religion portrays a vital part of the socio-cultural lifetime of people which is mostly found in their understanding of society. The empowerment of the female gender becomes essential for establishing equal opportunities within society. In attaining equality, therefore, women's issues must first be upheld, and opportunities provided for them to excel. Strengthening a person's sense of independence, potential to make decisions, exposure to skills, support and the capacity to impact innovations are all part of empowerment. Empowered women have positive ripple effects on the well-being and economy of the larger society (Widanti, 2023). Though gender equality is the concern of all, women still do not have the same gateway to prospects and power in overseeing major affairs where men are predominantly present. Largely, this inequality has a resultant impact on the quality of work-life (QWL) of women in society. It affects all aspects of women's life domains (Goswami *et al.*, 2023). In comparison to their male counterpart, females have a lesser amount of hold to quality education, growth prospects and public involvement (Gerard, 2023).

Shortly, before the onset of the colonial period and the advent of the Christian religion in Africa, women took part in the decision-making process for creating changes and for monitoring the status quo in their societies. In the old Oyo empire, women occupied significant positions in the palace. For instance, the position of the Alaafin's wives (the *ayabas*) was accorded much power and prestige. The *ayaba* was crucial in the hierarchical set-up of the Oyo palace. Johnson-Bashua (2022) in his work on the Oyo empire stresses the ritual functions of these *ayabas*. Johnson-Bashua (2022) also shows that the consent of the formal Alaafin's wives is vital to the final selection of future *Alaafin*. Indeed, the Alaafin's wives provided *Oyomesi* adherents entrance to the king. Additionally, the presence of the king's wife is critical anytime the king must speak with the *Oyomesi*. She also serves as the primary carer to regional leaders namely *Onjo*, *Onigbama*, *Okere* and *Onikoyi*. Over time, the king's wife would gain the influence and control of the king in the city and countryside (Adesina, 2023a). There was also the role of the "little mother". She represented the pyramid structure to several district heads. Others were *Iya-Afin* and *Erelu*. They functioned as the religious advisors to the highest spiritual cult in their towns as well as a go-between between the king and the populace. Women are the keepers and transmitters of religious traditions, at least in Yoruba culture, hence religion cannot be explored without them taking centre stage (Adesina, 2023b). During this period, women's lifestyles were comfortable, the king's wife's QWL was improved and they usually enjoyed all domains of their lives, as they were actively involved in the informed decision-making process. However, the position of women witnessed a downward turn with the introduction of western education, proselytisation of the Christian religion and the commencement of colonial rule. Colonial administration introduced the indirect rule system which depended mainly on the use of traditional rulers and other men in the society to implement and enforce its policies (Beissel *et al.* (2023). Women were completely relegated to the background in matters involving their communities. Men dominated the new administration at the expense of women. Women embraced and performed roles given to them by their religious leaders as a sign of their submission to the divine when Christianity arrived. However, these roles were subordinate, limiting women's capacity to reach their full human potential.

In furtherance of this discourse, several studies have shown that gender equality is essential for long-term political, economic, social and cultural sustainability, and any nation's progress. This in turn affects the QWL in society among this neglected gender. One of the

United Nations Global Agenda is ending hunger through the advancement of women's rights and equity. So, therefore, supporting women's equality is considered a boost to enduring development and sustainable QWL. Nations that foster women's rights have also been seen to experience quicker productivity expansion, greater living standards, lower bad governance and reduced rates of premature death. Expanding educational options for women, hence, leads to increased economic growth (Awoa *et al.*, 2022). To this end, gender disparity has been a major concern among women in society and gender advocates.

Considerations about discrimination among women are not unheard of in Nigeria. Evidence abounds in various aspects of human relationships that women are systematically deprived in comparison to men. The women's gender disparity has become a cankerworm in society not only in Nigeria but across the continents (Jones *et al.*, 2024). Also, prevailing legislation rules and practices worsen the problem (Onah *et al.*, 2023). Financial inclusion, literacy, housing, succession and private property rights are all areas where Nigerian women face discrimination and gender disparity (Kisusu and Tongori, 2023). This creates a system in which women are completely reliant on men for existence. This also puts women in circumstances where they don't have a say in major decisions that influence their lives. For example, women's lack of control over childbearing has hampered efforts to reduce the mother and child death rate. Women's physical and mental well-being are not adequately safeguarded. Governments have responded by enacting legislation to safeguard women's inclusion in the Nigerian constitution in Article 15 Section 2 and Article 42 Section 1 of Nigerian constitution. The two laws "prohibit discrimination based on sex and ensure that men and women have equal access to the courts in matters of contracts, torts and all civil matters" (Pogoso, 2012). Stressing further, in Articles 17 sections 1 and 2a, the constitution specifically acknowledges the equality of women stating their "rights, obligations and opportunities before the law". Section 2d article 16 validates the legitimacy of the entitlement to property and posits that "the State shall direct its policy towards ensuring suitable and adequate shelter [. . .] are provided for all citizens". Section 11 states that "women shall have equal rights as men with regard to employment opportunities, choice of professions, promotion and remuneration". Despite legislation protecting women and girls and promoting gender equality, there are some inconsistencies between what is written in the constitution and the real relationship between men and women (Asha, 2023). Customary and conventional rules, which function as a norm in the socialisation process, are substantially to blame for existing inequalities. Nigeria is home to a varied range of ethnic groups, each practising its own set of philosophy. While some principles are generalised, others belong specifically to one group. Yet, the majority of conducts and behaviours peculiar to many have detrimental repercussions upon the realisation of civil liberty, explicitly women's rights (Banjo, 2023).

The movement aimed at women's emancipation was more heavily influenced by global communities. The ten years from 1975 to 1985, known as the period for women, was declared by the United Nations. During this period, recommendations geared towards empowering the female sex were implemented. At the same time, Nigerian women attended a conference on women sponsored by the US government in Mexico. More than 20,000 people attended the conference in Mexico, where a variety of issues affecting women were debated for the first time on a worldwide scale under the subject "equality, development and peace" (Elhoushy *et al.*, 2023). Matters on equal opportunities in education, political participation, economic power, health and welfare have been dealt with. On the religious aspect, the United Nations Women's arm launched the "Global Platform on Gender Equality and Religion" on March 20, 2017. By fusing gender balance with religious values, this movement hopes to advance the realisation of global goals which include reducing poverty and promoting wellness, peace and security (Khan and Taela, 2023). Yet, the status of the female gender in society has continued to experience a downward turn on account of political, socio-cultural, economic and institutional arrangements in communities as well as the interpretations of religious contexts

(Andersen, 2023). Of course, religion plays a diverse and intricate role that changes over geographical distances. Thus, this study examines the root causes of gender inequality in religion, especially the Christian religion. The relationship between gender and religion influences women's empowerment and gender equality, the socio-cultural beliefs of society as regards the role of women in religion, and biblical contexts and interpretations of gender equality. Can we say that women's predicament started from creation or is socially constructed and determined, aided by verses from biblical texts and messages? Does the Bible preach inequality? Can we say from creation women are meant to be behind and men at the forefront in all?

Most Christian religious groups base their gender teachings on interpretations of the Holy Bible. Within these groups, however, there are differences in how each view is explained. Some religious views inspire a woman to stand her ground in certain regions, yet, in others, interpretations of scriptures relegated her to domestic responsibilities and subordinate roles. There are passages of the Bible that promote the gender stereotype that women are second-class citizens. *Genesis 1:27* says "So God created man in His image and the image of God created he; male and female created he them". This Bible verse shows that all mortal beings are created in the same manner by Almighty God in His own (God) likeness and image and that there is no superiority or inferiority before God. Another discourse in religion, as it influences gender equality and propagates inequality, is the interpretation of the Bible scripture that a woman was created out of man; therefore, a man cannot be equal to a woman. *Genesis 2:21-22* "The Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh and with the rib the Lord God had taken from the man He made the woman" (Musoni, 2023). From this, we can deduce that biologically women are different from men. However, this cannot translate to mean that all women are taken out of men. No. If the Bible says the first woman is taken out of the first man, this does not mean that women are inferior to men or that men are superior. If that should be the case, what would we say that women now deliver both male and female children? I Corinthians 11:12, "For although the first woman came from man every other man was born from a woman and everything comes from God (Kanyange, 2023). Furthermore, I Corinthians 14:34-35 says "let your women keep quiet silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak, but they are commanded to be under obedience as also said the law. And if they will learn anything let them ask their husband at home for it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church" (Ogwudile, 2023). This Bible verses can be attributed to the culture and beliefs of the people at that time. But now the world itself has changed and it's still changing. So many things have taken a new dimension in marriages, homes, societal settings, education and religion. We now have women in leadership positions in churches all around the world doing tremendous and marvellous work for God and society. What do we say about women like Aimee Semple McPherson of the Foursquare Bible Church, Joyce Meyer; a teacher and writer of the word, and many other women who have contributed immensely to the spread of the Gospel and winning souls for Christ? Do we say these women had sinned against God by not following the word of the scripture? No, these are women God is using mightily to propagate His work all around the world. Women are gifted, and families and churches thrive when both women and men use their gifts to lead and serve. However, women are restricted and relegated because of the superiority complex of men. Right now, women are not free to use their leadership gifts due to Christian patriarchy, sexist religious beliefs, misreading scriptures and strict gender roles (Berlanda *et al.*, 2023). Women are needed in leadership positions in all areas of economic development, including religious denominations. It's time we do away with cultural practices, historical development and religious norms that propagate gender inequalities. We need to bring more women to the decision-making tables of families, communities and churches. This study attempts to contribute to the multidisciplinary debate on the influence of religions and politics on gender equality in selected churches and political

public offices in the Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos State. Gender is used in this research in a general way that is virtually equivalent to referring to women, as well as to women's roles and status in religion and politics, from a purely descriptive point of view.

However, the purpose of this study is to assess the influence of religion and politics in advancing and preventing gender equality and women's empowerment, and towards a sustainable QWL in the Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos State. The impact of religion on gender equality and women's empowerment will also be evaluated and analysed in this study. To achieve this, these specific objectives that aided the accomplishment of this study goal are imperative:

- (1) To investigate positions of religious and other prominent leaders in Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Government Area (LGA) with respect to gender equality and women's empowerment in Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Government, Lagos State, Nigeria
- (2) To examine factors that aided Ajeromi-Ifelodun LGA's women's efforts to encourage gender equality, women's empowerment in politics and QWL
- (3) To analyse circumstances of religion and politics in Ajeromi-Ifelodun LGA that hampered gender equality and women's empowerment
- (4) To demonstrate how religious traditions, values, laws and procedures in Ajeromi-Ifelodun LGA support or hinder gender equality and women's empowerment
- (5) To present the positive steps to stimulate the roles of women in religious activities and their QWL in Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Government

1.1 Research questions

The study intends to address the following questions to meet the research objectives:

- (1) What do religious and other prominent leaders in Ajeromi-Ifelodun LGA think about gender equality and women's empowerment?
- (2) What factors have aided Ajeromi-Ifelodun LGA's efforts to encourage gender equality, women's empowerment and QWL?
- (3) What circumstances in Ajeromi-Ifelodun LGA have hampered gender equality and women's empowerment?
- (4) How do religious traditions, values, laws and procedures in Ajeromi-Ifelodun LGA support gender equality and women's empowerment?
- (5) What are the positive steps to stimulate the roles of women in religion and politics in the Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Government?

1.2 Research scope and delimitation

The geographical environment of the Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Government Area in Lagos State, Nigeria is the focus of this study. The local government was among the initial 20 local authorities created by the then Lagos State government before the establishment of local council development areas. On the northern part of Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Government lies Surulere Local Government; on its southern part is Badagry Express Way; on the western is Amuwo Odofin Local Government, while on the eastern part are both Apapa Tincan and Oshodi Apapa Express Way. Her land mass is estimated at about 2,216 hectares and the population is estimated at about 2.2 million inhabitants who consist of people of a variety of ethnic, tribal, and multi-national races and cultures that live in densely populated towns and cities. Some of these sparse towns or settlements are Alayabiagba, Ajegunle, Aiyetoro,

Araromi, Onibaba, Awodi-Ora, Ibafor, Layeni, Alakoto, Suru-Alaba, Dankaka, Oridulu, Oke-Oja, Amukoko and Mosafejo. What makes the community enviable and lively is its demonstrated interpretation of unity in diversity and variety, as seen by the peaceful coexistence of members from practically every ethnic group in Nigeria.

Ajeromi-Ifeodun Local Government was chosen because none of the several books written on the local government directly addressed the role of religion and politics in promoting and or hindering gender equality, women's empowerment and their QWL. Although the local government is made up of three religious groups in Nigeria, this research focused only on the role and positions of women in the Christian religion in the local government. However, to present a comprehensive and detailed study, the research discussed briefly the traditional roles and positions of women in Yorubaland. The Christian religion is further divided into Protestant, Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations.

The choice of the period (1975–2020) is because 1975 was a remarkable year in the history of women globally. Since that year the status of women has continued to attract significant attention and changes following the United Nations Declaration of the year 1975–1985 as the decade for women. Different policies aimed at empowering women in all sectors were considered during this period. There is the gendered division of labour and roles and gender stereotyping, harmful practices like child marriage, female genital mutilation and violence against women justified in the name of religion. This study, therefore, focuses its attention on the religious status and positions of women in Ajeromi-Ifeodun Local Government and how it influences their QWL. The terminal date of 2020 is chosen to verify the achievements of the Global Platform on Gender Equality and Religion launched in March 2017 by the Women's arm of the United Nations Organisation in respect of gender equality, religion and women empowerment at the local government level.

2. Review of literature

2.1 Theoretical framework

To demonstrate the inconsistency in the role and status of men and women in the Christian religion sphere, two major classifications of concepts have been presented within the code of religion paradigm. The first concept relies on the socio-cultural factors that affect male and female views of religion. Gender norms socialising concept and Constructional or Formational concept are two types of postulations in this category. The next set of concepts centres on individual intellectual features that separate man from woman which include the depth psychology concept, personality concept and Sexual orientation concept.

2.1.1 Gender norms socialising theory. The gender norms socialising concept discusses the distinctions between male and female social placement as well as the variances in individual cerebral knowledge. In the contemporary western world, men are socialised to believe that aggression and force are perfect traits. Female socialisation, on the other hand, is considered to have an emphasis on dispute settlement, tenderness, unravelling, understanding, obedience and other responsive characteristics that align with scriptural dimensions (Eagly and Wood, 2012). Similarly, Echavarren (2023) hold that gender norms socialising and parent-child contact lay a greater focus on religion and compliance in girls than in males. Given the fact that males and females have different socialisation experiences, they argue that gender disparities in teenage behaviour should be predicated on the private but not the public aspect, whereas both sexes should act uniformly to observable pressures on the public dimension (Richard *et al.*, 2023). They also proposed that there should be disparities in the private dynamic towards teens who are church devotees but not clique-like spiritual references (Halim *et al.*, 2023). Gender norm socialising theory's ability to explain gender variations in religion is being weakened by cultural trends that may favour treating boys and girls similarly. However, this theory provides the basis and necessary background for this

study. It resonates with this study as it is associated with both constructs under investigation. The study explores the religious and gender perspective of women personalities and that is the thrust of this study. Thus, gender norm socialising theory connects both religion and gender dichotomy given the explanation offered above.

2.1.2 Constructional or formational theory. To present the variations in religious beliefs of men and women, Constructional or Formational theory is divided into two categories. Beginning with an emphasis on the role of women in raising children (Rosa and Schulz, 2023), Kim (2023), claimed that women's family-centred roles increase reliance upon unique factors since religion, which attends to peculiarities, is consequently much more valued by the female gender than their male counterparts (Reckwitz and Rosa, 2023). According to Hoggan and Kasl (2023), parents believe that the church is beneficial to their children. Mothers go to places of worship as primary caregivers to buoy up their family participation. Chang *et al.* (2023) argue in support of the constructional theory, claiming that both genders have distinct relational roles, defined similarly to the mother's household duty and the father's productive function. They go on to say that the links uniting household and church remain very strong compared to those between the state and the church. It stands to reason that women who play a larger role in the home should be anticipated to engage in more spiritual activities (Miao, 2023). Moreover, mothers should be their children's primary close friends to teach them values as part of socialising. They do this in part by setting an example for others, turning up at the place of worship and displaying godly values. On the other hand, fathers are assigned jobs that are more utilitarian than affective; hence, they tend to be less morally concerned (Diez-Martín *et al.*, 2023).

According to Bartlett and Camba (2023), females attend church more frequently than males, in part, given that partaking in church programs is an offshoot of the domestic labour division. On this basis, involvement in religion is considered a home task carried out by the housewife who can devote the proper amount of time (Painter, 2023). Also, Kheloui *et al.* (2023) regarded religion as a commodity that reflects an unspoken workforce division (Schmid and Elliot, 2023). Based on this, De Vaus developed a set of specific hypotheses. According to this scholar, mothers will attend congregational services more frequently than women without children; and starting a family will increase women's church membership more than it will increase for men. Also, there will be higher worship appearances for mothers and fathers than it will be for couples without kids. Gates and Steane (2009) presented two counter-arguments to explain this type of formational theory. In their foremost assertion, they argue that taking care of family is time-consuming and can hinder rather than increase chapel attendance (Jennings and Tonoyan, 2022). Secondly, they contend that the chapel is inclined to act as a surrogate for those without children, drawing a greater percentage of them as opposed to a smaller percentage. This family surrogate idea, notwithstanding, has little empirical backing.

The next constructional argument put forth to account for greater female religious commitment places attention on their different positions within the working environment. In this perspective, engagement in the current secular environment reduces females' religious involvement (Kaufmann and Derry, 2023). Women are less secularised than men because they may not be inclined to be completely integrated into the existing public sphere (Tonoyan and Olson-Buchanan, 2023). Pownall (2023) made a similar case when he described the emergence of a society in the northeastern United States. He adds, "As males entered the business world, Christianity had become the domain of women. The proportion of women to men in church membership climbed across the ages, beginning at the end of the seventeenth century and continuing into the eighteenth" (Drumond and Rebelo, 2023). Another subsequent line of thought states that the female gender turns to religion for social support to deal with the increased deprivation she feels that no link to social interactions exists in the workspace. The female sex turns to spirituality in pursuance of comfort in order to compensate for not having access to the relatively appreciated position of the salaried worker. A competing point of view

states that women are better off compared to men at staying away from churches because of tensions amid business competitions and the core principles of Christianity (Di Battista *et al.*, 2023). A fourth strand simply asserts that women can dedicate more time to the church if they are less committed to their jobs. Based on this, Vardy *et al.* (2022) developed a set of hypotheses and claimed that if the amount of workforce involvement could be maintained, then, the inequality between men's and women's religious commitment would also disappear. Furthermore, the spirituality of working women ought to be lower as opposed to that of non-working women and the spirituality of non-working men ought to be higher as opposed to that of working men (Vardy *et al.*, 2022). Yet, if the degree of workplace engagement is maintained, most women relative to men will visit their place of worship. Contrary to popular belief, however, people who probably would not work all day went to church less frequently compared to people who did. These assumptions are again contradicted by other empirical investigations. For instance, according to Bryukhanov and Fedotenkov (2023), working women visit their place of worship regularly compared to stay-at-home mothers, and the likelihood of spirituality is lower among emerging adults without jobs versus those who have jobs. To explore these ideas further, using indices of spirituality, personal convictions, insights and religious adherence, the findings revealed that women who worked all day are far less pious compared to stay-at-home moms while the spiritual inclination of employed women is fairly comparable with that of employed males, even though women who work round-the-clock attend church not more than permanent working men. Unemployed men, on the other hand, are the least religious of all (Muharam *et al.*, 2023).

Kisusu and Tongori (2023) investigated the relationship between being in the labour field and going to church, focusing on a data set consisting of identified Christians who go to the chapel quite frequently. The findings reveal that there is no substantial difference in church attendance between men and women among full-time workers. Women, however, are substantially better frequent attendees among casual employees and non-workers. Thus, 54% and 55% of male and female believers respectively go to church meetings regularly, while 58% of male church members and 62% of female church members often go to meetings among non-workers (Hellwig *et al.*, 2023). Social changes that may support offering equal chances for both sexes may diminish the effectiveness of a formational framework to analyse differences in religious practices among individuals. This notwithstanding, the theory accounts for the reasons behind the disparities in women's church attendance compared to that of men which form the problem statement of this research.

2.1.3 Depth psychology theory. Depth psychology theory is one of the foremost recognised concepts that explain sex variations and gender disparity in religiosity which emanates from psychoanalysis theory by the Austrian Neurologist Sigmund Freud (Simanke, 2011). Lockie (2003) argued that the Almighty God is patterned just like earthly parents and our relationship with Him depends on the relationship with our birth father. It is easy to foresee sex differences, if the concept of Christ, perhaps, as the second father can be evaluated in terms of Freud's immature gender expression (Craig, 2007). Boys are supposed to come out of the Oedipus complex with mixed sentiments about their father; he is feared since he is a more formidable competitor for the mother's affections, but he is also admired. As a result, a male should have mixed feelings about God, the projected father. Girls, on the other hand, should have a more pleasant, less ambivalent relationship with their dad, since he represents the symbol of their naïve libido. Women should be more drawn to God if they project their feelings upon Him (Rubovits-Seitz, 2013). Moreover, pictures of God are compared to drawings of parents in a thread of empirical study that investigates components of this Freudian-based theory. The results of this line of inquiry are inconsistent and inconclusive. There are four major tendencies that can be detected. First, Sobirovich (2021) discovered that both males and females in their American samples emphasised the father over the motherly picture of God. Similarly, Adeosun and Owolabi (2021) discovered that both sexes perceived

God as being a father above being a mother. [Norocel and Giorgi \(2022\)](#), in complementary research, also found that the relationship connecting God and all males and females remained dominant for both sexes. Thus, the Freudian idea is supported by both sets of evidence. In a separate analysis of a French-speaking Belgian group, [Sobirovich \(2021\)](#) positioned that everyone emphasised the affectionate picture of God that corresponded to each person's sex. Finally, a preliminary examination of Canadian students highlighted the strong link relating to the perception of God to His maternal picture in all mortals indicating gender disparity in its habitual form ([Cullen et al., 2024](#)). The above-mentioned discoveries are in direct opposition to Freud's theory. A collection of research also points to the inadequacies of the Freudian theory, indicating how women have a greater effeminate conception of God compared to men.

2.1.4 Feminist theory and empowerment theory. Feminist theory and empowerment theory resonate with gender disparity and gender inequality in this study. Feminist theory prescribes that women's neglected status in society is a result of social inequality and superiority proclamation of men which is influenced by political, economic and social power relations ([Maschi et al., 2022](#)). The theory is of the view that women should have unfettered equal access to all forms of power and resources in society ([Angeles, 2023](#)). Feminist emphasis is on gender politics, power relations and sexuality to evaluate gender disparities and inequalities. However, feminist philosophy critiques these social and political ties, while also advocating the improvement of women's rights and interest ([Sirri, 2024](#)). Feminists were of the view that societies give credence and priority to men's views while women are neglected and given unfair treatment in any given event ([Pal and Nieto-Fernandez, 2024](#)). Efforts to address this involve tackling gender stereotypes and making sure that women acquire the same educational, professional and interpersonal opportunities and outcomes as men ([Cabell, 2024](#)). The rights of women, including but not restricted to the freedom to vote, hold public office, work and earn equal pay, own property, obtain quality education and possess the same rights within marriage, have been advocated for by feminist movements ([Turner et al., 2024](#)).

Save to champion women's rights and interests, the empowerment theory is imperative and significant to understand how empowering women would help to ensure gender disparity is removed and maintain gender equality. The feminist movement, like empowerment, assists women to understand and recognise how oppressive and dominant they have been in the scheme of events in their society. At the same time promote their capacity to contribute and participate in efforts to provoke robust societal change ([Pécot et al., 2024](#)). The ability to use intervention strategies to lead people towards a sense of control is a pivot goal of the empowerment paradigm of social work. For instance, individuals experience powerless situations for several reasons, but the empowerment theory concentrates on how oppression plays a role in this. Thus, the empowerment theory directs the energy on providing marginalised women with the personal, interpersonal and political power needed to improve their worsened situations on individual, group and societal levels ([Gomez-Borquez et al., 2024](#)). Also, the apparatus goal address systems that limit or prevent women from achieving their basic needs, which is prioritised. That is why, [Rubel et al. \(2024\)](#) argued that one of the ways to fully and adequately empower women is to ensure an equal number of political seats and participation; hence, the social, political and economic bottlenecks experienced as challenges in the feminist movement should be ameliorated. Other studies have put together, like this study, the feminist theory and empowerment theory to underscore women's participation in politics and religion ([Azizuddin and Shamsuzzoha, 2024](#)).

2.2 Synopsis of Christianity in Nigeria and women's posture

Nigeria can be described as a religiously diverse community. The two primary religions prevalent in Nigeria are Christianity and Islam, with the Muslims dominating the North and the Christians dominating the South. According to recent estimates, between 40% and 49.3%

of Nigeria's population practices Christianity. Around 74% of those surveyed include Pentecostals, 34% are Catholics, and the remainder shared other Christian religious bodies. Over time, there has been a dramatic increase in the Nigerian Christian population from around 21.4% in 1953 to around 49.3% in 2010. There are over 75 million Christians today (Okoli and Okwuosa, 2020).

Christianity has a long history in Nigeria, its origin can be traced to the fifteenth century during the visit of Romanian navigators, who became the earlier Europids that settled on the country's coastlands via the Atlantic Ocean (Olademo, 2016). These Caucasians brought the Christian religion, though, could not successfully establish it following their role in the slave trade (Udoh *et al.*, 2020). During the seventeenth century, Roman Catholic missionaries attempted to re-establish Christianity in the region. They arrived as merchants, travelled into the hinterlands, dealt in commercial transactions and delivered sermons to the natives. Many of the monarchs, leaders and natives were obsessed towards the new things brought by the Europids such as firearms, wines and mirrors than the new religion that was being given to them (Bosede-Gladys, 2015). Events took an intriguing turn after the British Empire abolished the slave trade in 1833. Some of the liberated slaves began to return home towards the end of the nineteenth century (Olasupo, 2016). There were devout Christians among them who shared the gospel with their family and neighbours. A large percentage of former slaves converted to Christianity over time. Samuel Ajayi Crowther was one of those slaves worth mentioning. He was appointed as Bishop and was a pioneer in local Christian missionary activity in Nigeria.

A significant effect of the Christian religion in connection with the position of womanhood in Nigeria was seen in excluding the female sex from the clergy and administrative system of churches. Women who opposed this acted as a catalyst for the foundation of African churches like the Cherubim and Seraphim formed in 1925 by fifteen-year-old Abiodun Akinsowon and the Aladura founded later by Sophia Odunlami and Sara Amope (Oyetade and Femi-Olubi, 2019). In these churches, women were given significant roles and high status. They acted as deaconesses, prophetesses and more.

2.3 The emergence of Christian religion denominations in Nigeria

The first church structure in Nigeria to be established and built was St. Peter's in Lagos in 1853. However, as Christianity spread throughout Nigeria, other churches were built in various cities over time. By the beginning of the twentieth century, a small group of devoted believers directed by a protestant leader formed the Christ Army, which broke away from the Anglican Church (Ajibola, 2023). Following an influenza pandemic in 1918, spirited wings broke apart from the Christ Army along with certain missionaries. These charismatic groups expanded in number and became autonomous churches known as *Aladura* ("prayer movement") because of their intense prayer methods. The Cherubim and Seraphim Church together with The Aladura Movement was formed in 1930 (Mckinnon, 2021). Faith Tabernacle's Joseph Ayo Babalola conducted an open sermon which indoctrinated hundreds of villagers. After clashing with colonial authorities in 1932, his prayer organisation formed a partnership with the Pentecostal Apostolic Church of Great Britain, but the partnership fell off because of dissimilarities in beliefs (Oyetade and Femi-Olubi, 2019). Therefore, Apostle Joseph Ayodele Babalola established the autonomous Christ Apostolic Church in 1941. Some overseas Episcopalian movements kick-started an offshoot in Nigeria over the next two decades that followed (Adedibu, 2023). Among those formed were Assemblies of God and Welsh Apostolic Church in 1931 and 1939, respectively. The Foursquare Gospel Church was established about the same time. Pentecostalism exploded in popularity towards the start of the 1950s. Reverend Josiah Akindayomi, who was formerly part of the Cherubim and Seraphim order, started the Glory of God fellowship (*Egbe Ogo Oluwa*) which later became

known as Redeemed Christians Church of God in 1952. Pastor E. A Adeboye took over as his successor. The Deeper Christian Life Ministry was also formed in August 1973 by William Folorunsho Kumuyi, while “Winners’ chapel”, was founded by David Oyedepo in 1986. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, new charismatic congregations sprang up and flourished. Religious activities began to thrive, and new churches sprung up in every corner of the country (Adarigho, 2023).

Ajeromi-Ifelodun indigenes, however, tolerate and appreciate different religious groups each going about its worship without any molestation. There are different denominations of Christianity in the local government. Churches belong to the Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Catholic, Jehovah’s Witnesses - Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Redeemed Christian Church, Deeper Christian Life Ministry, Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, to mention but a few. Some are from the Orient such as Eckankar, Grail Message and others. The traditional form of worship despite modern religions seems to still occupy the peoples’ beliefs in the area such as *Oro*, *Egungun*, *Eluku* and other traditional religions are still being practised in Ajeromi-Ifelodun. This is concretely seen at road junctions, where sacrifices of different forms litter the ground.

2.4 Traditional religion and the status of women

It is undeniable that women have witnessed serial prejudice in religious settings in Nigeria and the localities around them. Despite that, they seemed to exert power within their ancestral cultures, particularly through participation in various fraternities in which they were key players. Succinctly put, females in traditional communities were not fully regarded as inconsequential in matters relating to religious rituals. Through religious involvement, women were allowed to establish lead positions within the community (Omotayo, 2023). Yoruba women provide their most important contributions to the management of Yoruba society in the traditional religious arena. Yet, this entire notion of a woman’s religious function is unsupportable.

The Yoruba women were in charge of keeping sacred places of worship clean. Women maintain an active role in religious rites and act as religious leaders in various circumstances. According to Okunade (2022), there are some cults in which men and women participate equally, and authority concerning those cults might be in the hands of either sex following hierarchical selection. For instance, Yoruba women, without a doubt, were enthusiastic about Osun worshipping at Osogbo, which is predominantly dominated by them. Women are more prominent than men in most of the cults when it comes to performing religious tasks, as well as the dominant order of authorities (Udasmoro, 2022). Women who did extraordinary accomplishments in Yoruba civilisation are numerous in history, actions that earned them the title of goddesses. Female deities like *Moremi*, “*Yemoja*”, “*Yemule*”, “*Osun*”, “*Yemoji*”, “*Yemowo*”, “*Orisa-Oko*” and “*Oso-Usi*” all sacrificed passionately to save their people from several oppressions were worthy examples.

Women were allowed to join the priesthood at the highest level. In the cults, they function as priestesses. The mother of thunder (*Sango*), *Iya-Sango*, is a prominent figure in the religion of Sango (the God of thunder). According to Beier (Isiani *et al.*, 2023), this is due to the respect that all the world’s people have for her. This woman – “*Iya-Sango*” – exerts great authority due to the reverence she is accorded by all cult worshippers, as well as the importance of the power of her dominions and offerings (Omotoye, 2022). The king of Osogbo would not make judgements excluding the deliberations of “*Iya Osun*”. Women who have some knowledge of divination can also act as healers. They are a vital part of the divinity religion, and men frequently consult them when they are depressed. They combine the art of healing with the art of childbearing as medicine women (Hambali, 2022). *Osanyin*, *Orunmila*’s wife, is credited with the art of healing in Yoruba mythology. Women healers are so regarded and respected

among the Yoruba. They are thought to be powerful. “*Iya Omisegun*” (she specialises in traditional medicine), “*Iya Abiye*” (traditional/local midwife) and “*Iya Elewe Omo*” (she deals and sells local plants for curing sickness in little children) are among the titles bestowed upon them (Oguntola-Laguda, 2022). What can be deduced from all of this is that females in Yoruba traditional culture cannot be relegated, particularly when it comes to matters relating to religious ritual matters, which have significant effects on society.

Religion is a dimension of culture that has a significant influence on people’s lives. It is what most people cherish most and it serves as the foundation for their lives. Traditional Yoruba women are noted for being deeply religious, and they are deeply involved in it from birth to death. A typical Yoruba woman would pray for her family as well as others of good intent. “In everything they are religious”, we could say of Yoruba women, much as Apostle Paul describes the Athenians (Ogunnaike, 2022). Men are the drummers, while women offer the rituals needed for spiritual functions. They serve under the name of female priests, visionaries, menders, traditional doulas, as well as keepers of shrines and inner sanctums. Mbiti observed that women in virtually all parts of Africa have been the custodians of their traditional culture as priests and priestesses and are vast in local medicinal treatment (Elugbaju and Fagunwa, 2023). However, traditional healing can be practised by both men and women, with women often addressing many of their medical issues and those of their children. In all of these, being at the front burners of the traditional religion enhanced their QWL and well-being, and they were delighted in the society.

2.5 Women’s status and position in the church

The Bible asserts that male dominance was a feature of the period of Lord Jesus and the pioneering Christians. This is reflected in most Christian gatherings today, where it is thought that a man and a woman should have separate functions and positions as God creates them differently. In the New Testament, wives were urged to surrender to their husbands because they were lords over their wives; husbands were leaders or commander-in-chiefs of their wives. Also, Paul in the book of First Timothy makes assertions that “women should learn in silence and all humility. They did not allow them to teach or to have authority over men; they must keep quiet” (Demas and Kwanneri, 2023). Such biblical texts place limitations on the role and pedigree of womanhood as secondary to manhood.

However, before the advent of Christianity, the female gender had been considered a major religious figure traditionally. Her religious functions are not restricted to traditional religion. Females have shown themselves relevant in the church in so many ways even from biblical days, yet they have not been able to climb to the top echelon leadership positions amidst the male folks (Aihiokehai, 2022). This is because Jesus Christ picked His Apostles among the male population, the main evangelical work was done by men; narrative accounts in the New Testament were put together by men, and control of church leadership was given to men. Despite Paul’s esteem for women and his willingness to work with them for the sake of the gospel, he did not designate any female elders or pastors (Odey and Osim, 2023). It was argued that in Paul’s writings, he emphasised that males should be the church leaders whereas females should neither lead nor exert power over males. Women are therefore banned from church leadership over men, although they are spiritual equals to men and their ministry is vital to the body of Christ.

Many Christian faithful are of the opinion that both sexes are formed after God’s image and should be seen and treated the same way. “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female for we are all one in Christ Jesus” (Robinson and Bowens, 2023). Roman Catholics hold that both the man and the woman in holy matrimony should treat each other with high regard and admiration.

Though the status of women in Christianity is a contentious issue, it is clear that they are not pushovers when it comes to making crucial decisions. The office of the pastor’s wife,

priest's wife, general overseer's wife, or as the case, may be compared to that of political leaders' wives. This office, while not wholly new, is a distinctive element of contemporary Christian ministry, giving rise to titles like "Mother of General Overseer (Mummy G.O)", "Mother-in-Israel" and "Mummy in the Lord", among others. In addition, there are a number of churches that were created and are managed by women. Women in Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Government take an important role in society's religious activities. They have faith in God and have various tales to describe the presence of God. God is revered by the women in their religious experiences; he is honest and practical (Anthony and Udoka, 2023).

2.6 Christian religion denominations and the role of women

During the past few years, women's inputs within the range of Christian practices have evolved, incorporating a transformational approach and legitimate rights, yet there is room for improvement in the field of religious participation for women (Zurlo *et al.*, 2023). The Papacy, in 1994, issued a canonical message stating that pastoral appointments are beneficial to men only (Okpaleke and Nweke, 2023). He wrote throughout the message that women's involvement, functions and engagement within the House of God remain vital, unique and invaluable despite that they are unrelated to sacerdotal. Since then, several female Catholic members have fought for the right to serve as priests. According to Pope Francis, women may conduct Bible readings at the time of church service. He pronounced this amendment in order to acknowledge the positive impacts women played in the church. He, however, reiterates that women cannot be ordained as priests. Maintaining women's subordination in Christendom remains extremely detrimental to their religious, mental and spiritual health (Demas and Kwamneri, 2023).

Women, according to the Baptist Church, are complementary to men and cannot exercise control over them. Conferences on women's related issues are held monthly by the Baptist Convention to encourage women to thrive in their relationship with God (Gbadegesin, 2023). In a resolution released in 1980, Baptists reiterated its religious position, which advocates for women's fair treatment but is biased in all its functionality. Since then, a variety of organisations have called for the canonisation of Baptist women, yet little progress exists. "All Jehovah's Witnesses are preachers, or pastors", according to a member of the denomination who was interviewed. Women, however, do not engage in church leadership but do participate actively in general evangelism and make every effort to have a positive impact. Various factions of Jehovah's Witnesses have begun to raise objections regarding women's status. According to a member of the religion interviewed, Christian women perform supplementary roles to men in most church activities. He further explained that church thinks that women should be obedient to their husbands and that all major choices should be made by the husband. Patriarchy pervades Jehovah's Witnesses organisation in which females are not allowed to hold positions of leadership and are expected to regard males as their superiors. Women can only teach in the church when men are not available and must cover their heads to show that they are submitting to male authority. In 2019, a Jehovah's Witness support organisation built a website for youth members to use as a resource. They publish articles about various church members' experiences to assist those who desire to know and understand the faith deeply, while also discussing the challenges that people face (Dosekun, 2023). With this positive development, issues concerning female folks and their religious participation were outlined and addressed.

A "priesthood of all believers" is common in protestant organisations. Headship and control responsibilities may not be appointed to a formally ordained priest in several of these religions because every baptised Christian is already considered a priest (Ingersoll-Wood, 2022). As a result, several of these religions have paved the way for women to serve as pastors and leaders. Female diocesans, Methodist preachers, Baptist reverends, Presbyterian clergy

and other positions are available to women (Adedibu, 2023). Yet, the probability of women holding a majority of leadership roles is highly dependent upon the values of people living within the region. "If the culture reflects a poorer position of women, then the religion will most certainly reflect that as well", said a Redeemed member. All religions have different traditions and practices when issues regarding gender equality are brought forward. This is so glaring among Christendom that churches and other Christian denominations hold onto their separate doctrines and beliefs. Women cannot be ordained in some Methodist groups, but they can in others. Even though progress for women's rights in faiths might be extremely gradual, especially in conservative traditions there is a March ahead in all religions (Adarigho, 2023). In the same vein, the Latter-day Assembly Church has received criticism for refusing to ordain female priests. God views men and women equally according to the church, but their duties are determined by gender. Women, like men, are granted leadership roles in the church. They have their own women's organisations and are known as instructors, ministers, and leaders.

3. Methods

3.1 Research design

The historical technique and scoping review strategy were applied in this research. The study used a qualitative research approach to investigate the phenomenon. This aims to create chronological recordings of unique events that occurred in the past or to suggest useful generalisations from experience through a survey of these occurrences that may operate as a control for behaviour in the present or future.

3.2 Sampling strategy

The study utilised two distinguished sampling strategies, purposive and snowballing sampling techniques, which were deemed suitable and useful due to the nature of the study. The reason for using purposive is that participants were chosen according to the need and purpose of the study of gender and women empowerment. Also, it helps the study to obtain qualitative responses that offer improved insights and accurate study outcomes (Adeoye, 2023). It further enables the study to collect in-depth data on gender disparity, religion, women empowerment and their QWL (López, 2023). At the same time, the use of snowballing sampling is considered owing to the study characteristics. Snowball sampling is also called chain or sequential sampling, it is useful in identifying the women in the study setting (Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Government Area). It is used where one participant led the researcher to other participants of this study who happened to share and nurture similar experiences in their life domain. It was used due to difficulty in accessing the respondents promptly. This assists the study in recruiting the participants through referral, as it is easier to establish trust and relationships with this set of women for data accuracy and integrity (Leighton *et al.*, 2021). Thus, both sampling strategies are crucial as they assist the researcher in seamlessly sampling participants who offer rich and meaningful information for this study.

However, the study relied heavily on oral data that were gathered from a variety of sources both inside and outside the local administration. Religious leaders such as Catholic leaders, protestant leaders, Pentecostal leaders and other significant religious leaders in the area were interviewed. Also, members of these religious denominations and some Christian organisations in the area were contacted through other notable individual men and women, indigenes and residents, who are vast in the history of the area. Oral interviews were also collected with a member of staff of the local government and some prominent politicians both men and women. Another category of people is the informants. These people are distinguished individuals who are familiar and vast in the knowledge and history of the

local government. These people fall within the age range of 37–80 years old, and the study discovered that 42 participants were recruited and interviewed for this study.

3.3 Method of data collection

The research objectives and questions play a pivotal role in this study whilst the literature review offers a basis for the reliability of the research questions and rationalises the present research for its novelty to the ongoing discourse (Marilyn and Gillam, 2004). The study developed two sets of interview guides for both women in the political space and women in the religious circuit in the Ajeromi local government area. Given the unexplored nature of gender, politics and religious practices in this region of Lagos State, this study utilised semi-structured interviews to illuminate how women in the study area understand and interpret gender sensitivity in politics and religion. The justification for using interviews as a data collection strategy is that it is claimed that interviews are suitable tools for the collection of data in gender-sensitive studies (Bell *et al.*, 2022). Heiselberg and Stepińska (2023) also argued that interviews are culturally sensitive and that women are more eager to offer information through oral narration, a traditional means of imparting and sharing knowledge than answering structured questions that involve writing. An interview guide was employed to ensure consistency in line with the research questions and systematic review of the literature (Brewster *et al.*, 2015). The interview pathway ensures that the interview addresses themes established in advance in the literature as essential to the research questions (Azungah, 2018). Furthermore, it gives a reasonably high degree of flexibility and structure compared to unstructured interviews (Patton, 2022).

3.4 Data analysis strategy

The study employed an inductive approach to analyse the data obtained from participants. A thematic content analysis was used to take away prejudice and establish an overarching impression of the interviewed data. The study identified and established common themes by sorting the data organically and finding notable common patterns across the data set. The study used both deductive and inductive approaches to analyse the data obtained from the participants. The deductive approach focuses on organising context consisting of themes for the coding process (Bradley *et al.*, 2007). The context is a start list applied in the evaluation with the expectation that important concepts are in the data set (Bingham, 2023). The inductive method, on the other hand, entails carefully working on the respondents' experiences, as this is a sensitive theme. In the inductive approach, the findings evolve from the analysis of the raw data and not from experiments or models (Proudfoot, 2023). The data analysis procedure commenced by arranging both interview and documentary data for each set of categories – women in politics and women in religion. As a first step, the study absorbed in reading data and assimilating it so as to make meaningful patterns out of the whole data set, and to decipher the true picture of the phenomenon through logical reasoning, impartiality and tracking the respondents' narratives (Court and Abbas, 2022). After multiple periods of reading the transcripts, the researcher started establishing the major concepts and themes through the lens of the research questions and objectives (Elo *et al.*, 2014). Transcribed interviews recorded were later imported into "Atlas.ti" software and read to highlight codes and categories using an inductive method to code, analyse and report the results.

4. Results and discussion of findings

4.1 Deductive data investigation strategy

The study utilised a deductive approach by subjecting the analysis to a pre-existing theory (Court and Abbas, 2022), that is gender norm socialising theory in this instance. Gender

sensitivity is examined on the account of gender variations in social, political and religious spaces. This is being weakened by cultural dispositions that give preference to the treatment of males differently compared to females. This theory provides a peculiar stance to this study in Nigeria as women are treated like aliens in the society especially when it comes to political offices as well as in taking leadership positions in churches. Also, depth psychology theory is used to explain sex variations in religion which evolved from psychoanalysis theory. This theory portends that it is easy to foresee sex differences, if the idea of God, as second father can be evaluated in terms of Freud's immature gender expression. The core of the theme depends on whether it represents something significant in connection to the overall study (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Therefore, to use the data maximally, a start list of *a priori* categories was created in accordance with prior studies (Zikic and Richardson, 2016; Zikic and Voloshyna, 2021) as shown in Table 1 – using the research questions. By using gender, politics and religion as an example, a start list is established from issues raised in response to interview questions in connection to the research questions.

4.2 Participants' demographic profile

Table 1 illustrates demographic profile of the interview participants in this study. It shows their ages, qualifications, their locality/region in the local government area as well as their profession.

Participants' status	Frequency	Percentage (%)	<i>n</i> = 42
<i>Sex</i>			
Female	42	100	
<i>Age</i>			
24 – 30 years	15	35.7	
30 – 35 years	10	23.9	
35 – 40 years	8	19	
40 – 45 years	5	11.9	
45 years above	4	9.5	
<i>Academic qualification</i>			
Bachelor degree	16	38.1	
Master degree	13	31	
Professionals	10	23.8	
Ph.D.	3	7.1	
<i>Profession</i>			
Corporate employee	7	16.7	
Entrepreneur	9	21.4	
Civil service officer	10	23.8	
Religious leaders	9	21.4	
Political party affiliates	7	16.7	
<i>Location/Locality (in Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Govt.)</i>			
Awodi-Ora	6	14.3	
Cardoso	6	14.3	
Araromi Ajeromi	6	14.3	
Aiyetoro Ajeromi	6	14.3	
Temidire	6	14.3	
Layeni	6	14.3	
Tolu	6	14.3	

Table 1.
Respondents'
demographic

Source(s): Authors' compilation from field survey, 2024

4.3 Interview analysis (inductive data investigation strategy)

After each interview with the respondents, transcripts were transcribed word-for-word and were carefully read to identify emergent themes. Table 2 shows nine broad interview issues germane to the research questions during the interview section. Anonymity transcripts of the recorded interviews were thoroughly addressed to ensure their precision and inclusiveness compared to the audio recordings. Individual identifiers and names of religious affiliation or political affinity were not transcribed. Transcribed interview recordings were imported into Atlas.Ti and read again to establish codes and categories employing an inductive method to code, analyse and report (Gupta *et al.*, 2022). This procedure fostered the ability to maintain familiarity with the data and gain better insights by evaluating frequently occurring themes and issues that signify solutions to the research questions thereby enabling conclusions to be drawn from the responses.

A codebook was created from the themes generated and from critical questions planned to provoke an exhaustive, nuanced investigation of gender empowerment, in religion and politics on their QWL in the locality. Coding and analysis were managed by the first author of this study. While second author embarked on another second round of qualitative process for extra coding to ensure inter-coder reliability during the exercise. The adoption of this important strategy enshrined the creation and highlight of fresh codes and sub-themes within the transcripts and this process was persistent until the level of saturation was achieved.

However, the concepts and categories of analysis were established directly by taking the words of the respondents. Data were arranged into core themes and sub-themes produced by the coding process, and extracts and demonstrative quotations of overall insights, and variations from the transcripts were taken to validate the outcome of major findings in this study. The participants/interviewees' own words were used to report the findings. Also, attention was duly given to the researchers' reflex journals to ensure that participants' biases were not accommodated. At the same time, the consolidated measures for reporting qualitative study guides were adhered to. However, a systematic process of achieving grounded theory methodology (GTM) is conducted. This involves three data analysis steps: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. The rationale for open coding is to extract the categories from the data, while axial coding helps to establish the interactions between the categories.

4.4 Emergent themes

There are three germane themes emanated from the data illustrated from participants' views on gender insensitivity of men-dominated domains in the community and locality, how women make informed decisions to survive their peculiar limitations or glass ceiling, and their attitudes towards promoting a supportive environment for other women. These major themes were (1) the Deep-rooted trend of institutionalised male dominance in politics and religious leadership, (2) Optimism for a turnaround narrative on gender equality in politics and religious leadership and (3) Women influencing the ethical and moral sense for change. These themes and other sub-themes as well as extracts are demonstrated in Table 2.

4.4.1 Deep-rooted trend of institutionalised men's dominance in politics and religion leadership. Women perceived less representation and men dominated the two domains of existence in their local environment. Women voiced an opinion that church leadership and politics are men-dominated and that women were relegated to the background as some of them opened up from this extract:

If you go to our churches in this environment, you will discover that church leadership is always dominated by our men rather than women, and they use biblical quotes to suppress our ability to thrive. This is also popular in political offices in our local government, and constituencies. Men are those personalities vying for senatorial and representative offices in our environments. I can

Interview guide and opinion pattern	Interview questions and affiliated research questions
1 Opinion on gender equality/disparity	<p>What is your level of understanding of gender</p> <p>What are your thoughts regarding gender equality in politics?</p> <p>What is your thought regarding gender equality in politics and religion? (Research Question 1)</p> <p>How do you know that women were marginalised in politics in your locality? (Research Questions 2 and 3)</p>
2 Opportunities concerning sex/Gender of the People	<p>Is there any women empowerment that leads to QWL in your constituency? (Research Question 2)</p> <p>Do you think males enjoy opportunities such as empowerment in your area over women? (Research Questions 1, 2 and 3)</p> <p>What are the opportunities you experience in politics/ religion in your constituency? (Research Question 3)</p> <p>What are those incidents/activities that promote QWL and empowerment (Research Questions 2, 3 and 4)</p>
3 Gender and sex-associated challenges	<p>What are the problems you are constantly experiencing in the political space in your constituency?</p> <p>Concerns about gender and sex-associated ceiling do you observe men experience issues in your area when it comes to holding political posts?</p>
4 Challenges women face in their religion/church	<p>What are the challenges and issues women encounter to obtain free space to preach in church?</p> <p>What are the challenges and issues women encounter to lead a major role during church service?</p> <p>What are the challenges and issues women encounter to take a leadership position in church?</p> <p>What are the challenges and issues women encounter to reach general overseas positions in comparison with men?</p> <p>How are all these equal or vary?</p> <p>What is the position of religion and significant church leaders in allowing women to participate in key leadership roles? (Research Questions 1, 2 and 4)</p>
5 Integration of gender perspective or gender lens, "gender strategies" in politics	<p>Perception of women in politics from their constituents and local government area</p> <p>Perception of women in empowerment and their QWL improvement</p> <p>Are your leaders' beliefs centred on women's empowerment? (Research Question 1)</p>
6 Expertise in conduct with sex and gender in church and Political Arena	<p>How have you practised and integrated gender and sex in church and politics?</p> <p>Further Probing, what made it challenging and possible; what were the problems encountered; what were the roadblocks envisaged due to unwillingness from men, lack of financial muscle, a barrier from access to resources; how were these problems and roadblocks were solved; if they were not tackled, what posed threat; has the societal perception of women had any main impact; if yes/no, how? What provoked you to embark on such a drive?</p> <p>Are politicians in your locality and its environs utilising the masculine-dominated ability to suppress women in your area? (Research Question 3)</p>

Table 2.
Nine major participants' interview topics guide

(continued)

Interview guide and opinion pattern	Interview questions and affiliated research questions
7 Recommendations for gender equality in Religion and Politics	Can you offer us suggestions/recommendations on how you encourage and institutionalise gender equality in religion and politics in your locality and constituency? (Research Question 5)
8 Beliefs and views of researchers about gender and sex coming into politics and religion	We are looking at combining sex and gender in political space and religious settings, particularly church: What are your views regarding the potential and opportunities therein in terms of considering gender being sensitive in politics and religion? Probing for opportunities that can be derived from colleagues, and institutions – What changes can emanate from sex and gender into religion and politics?
9 Recommendations for improved women (sex and gender) coming into religious leadership and politics	Can you offer us suggestions for enhanced integration of women into religious leadership and political practice in communities, constituencies, states and Nigeria? How possible would it be to execute the suggestions you are proffering What would be significant to influence and persuade women from joining politics and religious leadership to invest their resources and efforts that will foster reality with all the watershed you offered?

Source(s): Authors' compilation from field survey, 2024

Table 2.

confidently express that anywhere you see 15 men for various political posts, hardly you see one woman

Women participants perceived that the number of females in the political space is increasing in Nigeria yet in their local government areas it has been politicised in choosing the competent women around them. However, there exists poor representation in both church leadership and key positions in politics. They are less likely to be elected to core political offices except for political campaigns which make them women leaders just for vote canvassing. Women expressed that they need to exert much effort to showcase that they have the ability and competence to hold political offices, even leadership posts in church, even though they were better placed than men as illustrated by the following extract:

It was not just mere tug of war to persuade and prove to top politicians in our communities as well as in our churches saying women can hold leadership positions than men do, women can also do it excellently. Presently, we do not have women leadership in our churches and women in our senatorial districts representing our constituency in the national assembly for the past 12 years

Regarding the interviewees' views, gender inequality results in poor QWL of women in their local environments. Some of them are emotionally battered as the relegation is out of this world. Other foreign nationals women are allowed to hold political offices, even churches. Personality like Joyce Meyer holds a very important leadership position with her husband in international space and some of them look-up to her as a yardstick and model. Women's perception of gender disparity leads to unequal power relations, social values, self-entitlements and roles in patriarchal societies. All the women observed men's dominant culture in politics and in churches today, which not only restricts their chance of being selected or nominated into leadership roles but also deters women from core political appointments and opportunities. As discovered, men are agitated and afraid, from women's perception, that women will change the status quo in politics and religion:

Giving the socialisation, the moment you are born parents advise their female child then to obey gender expectations. Females are socialised not to carry-on with heavy tasks, which drives even professions that women venture into. You can often see females being dissuaded from becoming a pilot, sailor or even politician, and encouraged to look in the direction of the nurse or, entrepreneurs among other lesser important professions

4.4.2 *Optimism for a turnaround narrative on gender equality in politics and religious leadership.* Table 3 demonstrates a thematic approach and the emergent themes that appeared from the interviewed participants. Women expressed their concern on strengthened public debate and campaigns on women representation, and against gender discrimination. They advocated for the possible integration of women into political offices and religious space, calling for a revolutionary trend and paradigm shift against gender prejudice. These public debates and campaigns are orchestrated by active women who dare to challenge the norm calling for evidence-driven transformation to women and female representation in both religious and political spaces. The active advocacy for women's participation in politics is yielding results in some parts of the states, despite that men's dominance is pervasive. Participants were of the view that there seems to be increased awareness of opportunities for women beyond being mere electioneering tools in the hands of politicians and the godfathers:

Truly, I want to confirm that there exist 99% of men in political offices in my local government than women, yet the trend is shifting gradually, yet there is also male dominance in our churches but I

	Key themes	Sub-themes	Illustrative extracts
A	Deep-rooted trends of Institutionalised Politics, and key leadership roles in churches and Societal Politics	Women are less represented in Politics and Religion Under-representation of women in churches The institutionalisation of godfatherism and Androcentric values system	There are more men in political offices than men in dominance in the political environment Things are more terrible in other local government. And I observe that is the skewness in the society these days
B	Optimism for Turnaround Narrative on gender equalities in politics and religion	Improve society discourse campaigning and agitating for gender equality	Presently we are having female representation as vice Chairperson. Previously, they were men, I guess, for now, we are gradually moving towards achieving women's representation
C	Women influencing the ethical and moral sense of change	Women neglect vital opportunities in politics. Gender mainstreaming into church leadership systems	I have discovered political post chance for females, but at the same time preparedness and courage needed to stand firm is important. For instance the issue of godfatherism wanting to have canal knowledge before supporting women in politics and major offices. This affected my well-being and QWL in the environs

Table 3.
Emergent themes, sub-themes and illustrative extracts

Source(s): Authors' compilation from field survey, 2024

pray for change towards that aspect. There was the emphasis on balancing gender composition in the field of politics and our elected offices at both state and national level, which will give us satisfaction at both the home front and in society, enhancing our quality of work-life

4.4.3 Women influencing the ethical and moral sense of change. Women expressed their concerns regarding the selection of people into political offices for elected political posts and observed the peculiarity of political godfathers fixing their favourite men into those offices. They demonstrated the bias of men towards women. However, women are driving conscience for ethical and moral change. Some people voiced that men were always on the queue list for such political offices, that is, it is years of waiting and endurance for some men. Even at this, women decried that queuing for another dispensation does not determine the competence of men and their ability to foster good governance compared to women's knowledge and competence:

... godfatherism plays an important role in my locality, they believed in putting their male personality into political offices, and they never believed in our potential to hold offices. Few of us had to rise against this poor selection agenda and prove that women can do better than their male counterparts. In the present administration of the federal government, women are holding ministerial offices which are encouraging for people like me

Generally, the participants in this study claimed institutional policies that will strengthen gender sensitivity. Data evidence to policies required to encourage gender balance in church leadership and political offices demonstrates increased advocacy to government and public policymakers. The available opportunities must be equitably opened to all and sundry, both women and men in the community. This is outcome is evidenced with the theory of empowerment as reviewed in this study (Pécot *et al.*, 2024; Sirri, 2024).

5. Conclusion and recommendations

This study has demonstrated that women are actively clamouring for empowerment and possible representation in both the political arena and in church leadership. They never wanted to follow business as usual in a male-dominated world anymore. Broadly speaking, females are less compelling than males in both formal and informal settings. When issues affecting their lives, health and rights are at stake, however, women no longer wish to fold arms and observe things again. Their war cry is for the provision of an even playing ground where both men and women will be free to participate and try their luck. It was clearly evidenced from this study that women would always perform their duties with diligence and commitment. Some even argued that what men can do, they can equally perform it better than men in all spheres of human endeavour. Therefore, there is a need to understand the fact that only men cannot successfully run the nation. A nation that ignores the participation of its female population in decision-making processes may never achieve gender parity and a peaceful atmosphere. Both men and women need to partner to achieve a peaceful society. Together they can build a greater future not only for their children but also for the nation, and generation yet unborn.

The study makes the following recommendations to the government at various levels, particularly at the local government level, the Christian religious organisations, church leaders and other civil institutions, and to support gender equality in the local government.

- (1) The study admonishes that the government explore increasing staffing levels at the local government to enforce and supervise actions relating to the improvement of women's status. Women can arguably be regarded as the life wire of a nation because without them the economy would grind to a halt, as they usually engage in more unpaid labour (community services) than men. They always stand up to be counted and have always done their best in society.

- (2) Government should embark on true and real women empowerment. Empowering women can be achieved through different means. Women's empowerment can be achieved by improving their access to development resources. They are to be given better and more formal education, which is meant to enhance productivity and raise income. Women, for instance, are traditionally in the softer fields (secretaries, nurses, catering, home economics, etc.), while men are in the technical higher status and higher income generating professions. There should be programs designed to empower women financially at all levels in the form of helping their vocations through loans and bank guarantees. More efforts must be geared toward ensuring easy loan and credit finance for women to keep encouraging them.
- (3) There is a need for government and societal leaders to encourage the girl child in the form of mandatory support for education and training, and for women in vocations through the setting up of various training centres. Female children must receive quality education to secure a brighter future. Measures must be taken to facilitate access to schooling for girls under conditions identical to those of boys. All hands must be on the desk to support average or low earnings women become more influential. Additionally, initiatives for training programs should be implemented to provide women with a means of support. By providing these, the government would be putting up more young women on the paths of women who have excelled and proved their mettle as builders of dreams of their communities, societies and nations. Then, they would come to the full realisation of being equal partners in progress with men.
- (4) Government at all levels and religious institutions should adopt developmental programmes that will enhance women's QWL and enable them to feel involved in a male-dominated ecosystem. Moreover, a look at the declarations and programs of actions of past global meetings and conferences on women will reveal that together they constitute a blueprint for achieving women's rights and gender parity. Adopting the guidelines should take care of the developmental needs and aspirations of every nation by leaders who truly desire progress for their countries through the joint contributions of the male and female populations. Two historic global gatherings namely: the *International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)* and the *Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW)* made pronounced significant advances on women and gender issues. These two conferences like other international conferences accorded the highest priority to promoting gender equality, women empowerment and elimination of all types of gender discrimination. The Beijing Platform presents a comprehensive and progressive agenda on empowering women and gender parity addressing critical issues concerning the female folks. Like the ICPD programs for actions, the Beijing Platform firmly establishes that the full partnership and participation of both men and women in cultural, social, political and economic activities in their communities and nations is key to human-centred sustainable development. The effective implementation of this declaration and recommendations needs the participation of all stakeholders, inclusive of global bodies. They should all be strong and steadfast advocates for the implementation of the agenda.
- (5) The federal government should remove all traces of negative attitudes towards women who participate in law-making or politics. The premise of 30% on average delegation of females at every level of politics and decision-making needs to be honoured and maintained. Just as Nigeria's co-signatories to global provisions and resolutions on feminist equality should also be taken seriously. Also, the government

should see to the implementation of affirmative action in the constitution. The affirmative action clause of the Beijing declarations must be executed to check male domination in the future. This can be achieved through the setting up of an objective opportunity council by the government for the purpose of promoting and enforcing a non-discriminatory policy against women. Also, there is a need for the government to effectively implement the national policy on women, which recognises the plight of women and provides sufficient regulations to allow the female population to actively take part in the law decision-making process.

- (6) Society should collaborate with Christian organisations to ensure that their beliefs, actions, and doctrines are consistent with prevailing standards. Moreover, in order to improve Christian leaders' comprehension of gender justice principles and applications, the government should engage faith organisations to develop projects primarily tailored towards church leaders to enable them to spread the gospel from a better-informed position. Furthermore, the government should collaborate with religious leaders to develop a variety of gender equality advocacy and sensitisation initiatives that may be employed at various levels in religious institutions.
- (7) The government should establish and implement a systematic evaluation mechanism to assess the conformity of local and international organisations, including religious institutions, with current laws and legislations. Given differences in societal views on gender parity, women's rights, and variances in teachings and interpretations of religious texts, this study proposes that religious instructions and sermons should be in line with standards and best practices on equality. Thus, every denomination should change its tenets and guidelines to conform with governmental laws and regulations. Religious institutions have been shut down because of violations of members' rights to equality and justice, rather than religious teachings. Hence, all faith communities need to design and actualise a sexuality code that is consistent with national, regional, and international gender and women's empowerment protocols and policies.
- (8) Churches should take concrete actions to promote equality for women in all positions of control and leadership. Religious institutions should develop or rather implement initiatives to improve females' mental and spiritual development, well-being and QWL so that they may become self-assured and effectively participate in the administration of their denominations. Faith organisations must also include in their administration policies that intentionally provide room for female members with headship, administrating and coordinating capabilities. Finally, Christian ministries should think about creating and executing programs to improve women's socio-economic standing.
- (9) Stressing further, since pastors and preachers are custodians and guardians of religious literature, they are more positioned to advise and persuade their flocks regarding problems of female rights. As a result, they should work together to learn their country's gender discrimination laws and establish common grounds amongst biblical teachings and interpretations, laws and regulations. Furthermore, religious leaders should pay special attention to gender equality and women's empowerment in their practice and preaching, using religious texts to promote awareness and knowledge, and should actively promote responsible behaviour that respects the dignity and rights of all people, regardless of gender. Other religious organisations, particularly those working in the field of gender transformation, must understand the human rights approach to gender justice to effectively support individual religious

institutions in developing and implementing gender policies that are consistent with human rights instruments; building religious leaders' capacity on gender mainstreaming; developing and implementing a range of advocacy and sensitisation programs around issues of gender justice that can be used at different levels within religious institutions; developing and executing processes to equip women for leadership within and outside religious institutions.

6. Practical implication

This study has demonstrated that truly there is gender prejudice and gender imbalance in men's dominated space. It is practically evidence in today's world that women are not folding their arms any longer, the awareness is increasing of the role and capacity of women in society and what they are capable of doing among men. The study, hitherto, has enshrined that women wanted to be visible and be heard in any human endeavour, especially in the events/activities that concern women and humanity. They wanted to be actively involved in the decision-making arm of society, politics and religion, where their well-being and QWL would be addressed without any sentiment or emotion.

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Corresponding author

Olusegun Emmanuel Akinwale can be contacted at: akinwaleolusegun@yahoo.com, olusegun.akinwale@live.unilag.edu.ng

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