Gender Differences in Voting Behavior in Funtua Local Government Area of Katsina State

[1]Husaini Shafii [2]Muhammad Abba Ango & [3]Aisha Suleiman Kurfi
[1&3]Department of Geography,
Federal University Dutstinma, Katsina State, Nigeria
[2]Department of Sociology Federal University
Dutsinma, Katsina State
Corresponding email: ihusaini@fudutsinma.edu.ng

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Abstract
This study examined gender differences in voting behavior in Funtua Local Government Area with a view to understanding variations in voter participation and decision-making between men and women. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design, and data were collected from 384 respondents using a structured questionnaire, complemented by qualitative responses to enrich the analysis. A multistage sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across the study area. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages, while the chi-square test was used to examine the relationship between gender and voting behavior. The findings revealed that male respondents exhibited higher levels of voter participation compared to female respondents, largely due to greater access to political information and engagement in public political discussions. In contrast, women's participation was constrained by socio-cultural norms, limited mobility, and dependence on family or community influence. The study further found that men were more influenced by party loyalty, whereas women were more influenced by candidate personality, religion, and social factors. The inferential analysis confirmed a statistically significant relationship between gender and voting behavior, indicating that gender plays a crucial role in shaping electoral participation in the study area. The study concludes that gender disparities in voting behavior are deeply rooted in socio-cultural and structural factors, and addressing these disparities requires targeted interventions aimed at promoting gender inclusiveness in political processes. It recommends enhanced voter education, empowerment of women, and community-based sensitization to reduce barriers to participation and foster more inclusive democratic engagement.

Keywords: *Gender, Voting Behavior, Political Participation, Electoral Decision-Making, Gender Inequality*

Introduction

Voting behavior remains a central theme in political science as it reflects how citizens participate in democratic governance and express their political preferences. In many democratic systems, including Nigeria, voting serves as a fundamental mechanism for selecting leaders and ensuring political accountability. However, voting behavior is not uniform across populations, as it is

influenced by several socio-demographic factors, among which gender plays a significant role (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Gender differences in voting behavior have attracted scholarly attention due to the variation in political preferences, participation levels, and policy priorities between men and women (Stockemer & Sundström, 2019). Gender, as a social construct, shapes individuals' access to political information, exposure to political processes, and overall engagement in electoral activities. Globally, research shows that women have historically been underrepresented in political participation due to structural barriers such as limited education, economic dependence, and socio-cultural constraints (UN Women, 2022). These inequalities often result in differences in political engagement, with men typically having greater access to political networks and campaign activities, which may influence their voting behavior and choices. Understanding these dynamics is essential for analyzing democratic participation in a more inclusive manner. In Nigeria, electoral participation has evolved, yet challenges such as voter apathy, electoral violence, vote-buying, and declining trust in electoral institutions continue to affect citizens' engagement in the democratic process (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2023). Recent studies indicate that socio-cultural and economic factors significantly influence voting behavior, and these factors often intersect with gender. For instance, women in some regions may face restrictions on mobility, limited access to political education, and socio-cultural expectations that limit their participation, while men may be more actively engaged in political processes due to greater exposure and societal encouragement (Okafor & Fagbemi, 2021). These realities demonstrate that gender remains a critical factor in shaping electoral behavior. In the context of Funtua Local Government Area, understanding gender differences in voting behavior is particularly important due to the socio-cultural and religious norms that influence political participation in the area. Northern Nigeria is characterized by strong traditional values that may affect the extent to which men and women participate in elections differently (Adeleke & Ajani, 2020). These norms often limit women's autonomy, restrict their access to political information, and influence their decision-making processes, while men are more likely to engage in political discussions and voting activities. Despite these dynamics, there remains a scarcity of localized empirical research examining how gender specifically influences voting behavior in this region. Previous studies on voting behavior have largely focused on factors such as political party affiliation, ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic status (Norris, 2019). While these studies provide valuable insights into electoral behavior, they often overlook the gender dimension or fail to examine it within specific local contexts such as Funtua. Recent global discussions have emphasized the importance of gender-inclusive political participation, noting that meaningful democracy requires the active involvement of both men and women in electoral processes (UN Women, 2023). The absence of sufficient empirical studies in this area represents a significant gap in the literature, particularly in understanding how gender shapes political preferences and voter turnout at the grassroots level. This study therefore seeks to examine gender differences in voting behavior in Funtua Local Government Area of Katsina State. It aims to provide empirical evidence on how gender influences voter participation, political preferences, and decision-making processes, while also identifying the socio-cultural factors that contribute to these differences. By doing so, the study contributes to ongoing scholarly debates on gender and political participation and provides insights that can inform policies aimed at promoting inclusive and equitable democratic engagement in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Voting is a fundamental component of democratic governance, as it enables citizens to express their political preferences and influence leadership selection. In Nigeria, electoral participation is a constitutional right; however, disparities in voter engagement persist across different segments of the population, particularly along gender lines. Despite formal equality, men and women often differ in their political participation, access to information, and voting behavior, raising concerns about the inclusiveness of democratic processes. According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (2023), voter participation patterns in Nigeria reveal inconsistencies that are often influenced by socio-demographic factors, including gender. Several studies have examined gender and voting behavior, but their findings present both insights and limitations. For instance, Norris (2019), in her study conducted in Western democracies such as the United Kingdom and the United States, found that women are increasingly participating in elections and, in some cases, voting differently from men due to policy preferences such as social welfare and education. While this study provides a strong theoretical foundation, its applicability to rural African contexts like Funtua Local Government Area is limited due to differences in socio-cultural structures, levels of development, and political systems. In a similar vein, Inglehart and Norris (2003), using a global dataset covering regions such as Europe, Asia, and North America, argued that modernization contributes to gender equality in political participation. However, their macro-level approach does not sufficiently capture the realities of rural communities in developing countries where traditional norms still strongly constrain women's political participation. In the African context, Bratton (1999), whose study was conducted in Zambia, demonstrated that gender, education, and income significantly influence voter participation. Although this study provides important insights into African electoral behavior, it is geographically and culturally different from Northern Nigeria, limiting its direct relevance to the socio-political dynamics of Funtua. More recent studies conducted within Nigeria, such as Okafor and Fagbemi (2021) in Lagos and Oyo States (Southwestern Nigeria), revealed that gender significantly influences political participation, with women facing structural barriers that limit their involvement in elections. However, the study is regionally distant from Northern Nigeria and does not account for the stronger influence of cultural and religious norms that characterize areas such as Katsina State. Similarly, Adeleke and Ajani (2020), whose study focused on Northern Nigeria, identified that cultural and religious norms significantly restrict women's political engagement. While this study is more contextually relevant, it lacks a localized focus on specific communities such as Funtua Local Government Area, thereby limiting its ability to explain micro-level variations in voting behavior. Stockemer and Sundström (2019), in their cross-national analysis of gender and political participation across multiple countries, emphasized that gender equality enhances political engagement. However, their study is largely quantitative and does not sufficiently account for the lived experiences and socio-cultural constraints that shape voting behavior in traditional settings.

Despite these contributions, a critical gap remains in the literature, as most existing studies are either conducted in Western contexts or at national and regional levels, without sufficient attention to localized dynamics within specific communities. There is limited empirical research focusing on how gender specifically influences voting behavior in Funtua Local Government Area. This lack of localized evidence makes it difficult for policymakers, electoral bodies, and development stakeholders to design effective interventions aimed at addressing gender disparities in political participation. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine gender differences in voting behavior in Funtua Local Government Area of Katsina State,

Nigeria, with the aim of filling the existing gap in knowledge by providing context-specific empirical evidence. The study is therefore necessary to enhance understanding of how gender shapes voting behavior and to inform policies that promote inclusive and equitable democratic participation.

Objectives of the Study

The **s**tudy aims at examining the gender differences jn voting behavior in Funtua Local Government Area of Katsina State. The specific objectives are to;

i. examine the level of voting participation among men and women in Funtua Local Government Area.
ii. identify the factors influencing gender differences in voting behavior in the study area.
iii. assess the extent to which gender influences voting preferences and electoral choices in Funtua Local Government Area.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

i. What is the level of voting participation among men and women in Funtua Local Government Area of Katsina State?
ii. What factors influence gender differences in voting behavior in Funtua Local Government Area?
iii. To what extent does gender influence voting preferences and electoral choices among voters in Funtua Local Government Area?

Literature Review/Theoretical Framework

Voting behavior has been widely examined as a critical component of democratic participation, with particular attention given to how socio-demographic factors such as gender shape electoral choices. Recent scholarship emphasizes that gender remains a significant predictor of political participation, influencing not only whether individuals vote but also how they make voting decisions (Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Stockemer & Sundström, 2019). Across different democratic settings, gendered patterns of political engagement continue to evolve, reflecting both structural inequalities and changing socio-cultural norms. Women's political participation has increased globally, yet disparities persist, particularly in developing countries where traditional norms still influence political behavior (UN Women, 2023). Empirical studies have shown that men and women often differ in their political priorities and voting preferences. Norris and Inglehart (2019) argue that women are more likely to support policies related to social welfare, education, and healthcare, while men tend to prioritize issues such as economic growth and security. This divergence is often explained by differences in social roles, access to resources, and political socialization. Similarly, Stockemer and Sundström (2019) highlight that gender equality is strongly associated with higher levels of political participation, suggesting that societies with fewer gender disparities tend to exhibit more balanced voting behavior between men and women. In the African context, gender differences in voting behavior are often shaped by socio-cultural and institutional factors. Bratton (1999), in his study of Zambia, found that gender significantly influences political participation, with women less likely to engage actively in electoral processes due to limited access to education and economic resources. More recent studies have reinforced these findings within Nigeria. Okafor and Fagbemi (2021), in their study conducted in southwestern Nigeria, observed that women face structural barriers such as lower

literacy levels and economic dependence, which reduce their likelihood of participating fully in elections. However, their focus on urban and semi-urban areas limits the applicability of their findings to rural settings where socio-cultural constraints may be more pronounced. In Northern Nigeria, Adeleke and Ajani (2020) found that cultural and religious norms significantly restrict women's political participation. Their study highlights how gender roles and expectations limit women's autonomy in making political decisions. Similarly, recent institutional reports by the Independent National Electoral Commission (2023) indicate that gender disparities in voter turnout persist, particularly in northern states where socio-cultural norms are more restrictive. However, these studies largely provide regional or national perspectives without focusing on specific local government areas such as Funtua Local Government Area, thereby overlooking important micro-level variations in voting behavior.

From a theoretical perspective, several frameworks help explain gender differences in voting behavior. The sociological model of voting behavior posits that social groups, including gender, significantly influence political preferences and voting patterns through processes of socialization and group identification (Campbell et al., 1960). This theory explains how individuals' social identities shape their political attitudes and electoral choices, suggesting that gender roles within society contribute to differences in voting behavior.

Rational choice theory further explains voting behavior as a process of cost-benefit analysis, where individuals make decisions based on perceived advantages and available information (Downs, 1957). In this context, differences in access to education, income, and political information between men and women influence how each gender evaluates political options. Consequently, disparities in socio-economic resources may result in differing voting patterns between men and women. The gender and development perspective also provide a useful framework for understanding how structural inequalities shape political participation. This theory emphasizes that disparities in access to education, economic opportunities, and decision-making power affect the level of political engagement among men and women (UN Women, 2023). In many developing societies, including Nigeria, such inequalities contribute to lower political participation among women compared to men. Political socialization theory further explains how individuals acquire political values and behaviors through interactions with family, education, religion, and the broader social environment. Gender plays a significant role in this process, as men and women are often socialized differently within their communities, leading to variations in political awareness, engagement, and voting behavior. This is particularly relevant in culturally conservative settings where gender roles are strongly defined. Despite the contributions of these studies and theoretical perspectives, there remains a gap in the literature regarding localized analyses of gender differences in voting behavior at the grassroots level. Most existing studies are either cross-national or conducted in urban settings, with limited attention to rural communities such as Funtua Local Government Area. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by providing empirical evidence on how gender influences voting behavior in this specific context, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of political participation in Nigeria.

Justification for the Use of Political Socialization Theory

This study adopts Political Socialization Theory as its major theoretical framework because it provides a comprehensive explanation of how individuals acquire political values, attitudes, beliefs, and voting patterns through interactions with social institutions such as the family, religion, educational institutions, peer groups, and the media. The theory posits that political

behavior is learned rather than innate and that differences in political participation often emerge from varying socialization experiences. The choice of this theory is particularly relevant to the present study because gender differences in voting behavior are largely shaped by socio-cultural norms and expectations that influence men and women differently. In Funtua Local Government Area, traditional and religious institutions play significant roles in determining access to political information, participation in political discussions, and freedom to make independent electoral choices. Women are often socialized into roles that limit their exposure to political activities, while men are generally encouraged to engage in public affairs and political decision-making. The theory therefore helps explain why male respondents recorded higher levels of political participation and why female respondents were more influenced by family, religion, and community opinions in their voting decisions. It provides a suitable framework for understanding how gender-based socialization processes contribute to differences in electoral participation and voting preferences. Furthermore, Political Socialization Theory aligns directly with the objectives of the study by explaining: Differences in voting participation among men and women; The social and cultural factors influencing voting behavior; and the relationship between gender and electoral choices. Consequently, the theory offers a strong analytical lens for examining gendered patterns of political participation within the socio-cultural context of Northern Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design to examine gender differences in voting behavior in Funtua Local Government Area, as it allows for the collection of data at a single point in time and the analysis of variations between male and female respondents. The population of the study comprised eligible voters in the area, from which a representative sample was selected using a multistage sampling technique involving the selection of wards, households, and individual respondents, with deliberate attention to gender balance. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to capture socio-demographic characteristics, voting participation, political preferences, and factors influencing voting behavior; the instrument included both closed- and open-ended questions and was validated through expert review and pre-testing in a nearby community to ensure clarity and reliability. Trained research assistants administered the questionnaires, and ethical considerations were observed, including voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality of respondents' information. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages to summarize respondents' characteristics and voting patterns, while inferential statistics, particularly the chi-square test, were used to examine the relationship between gender and voting behavior and to determine the statistical significance of observed differences.

Justification for the Cross-Sectional Survey Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design because it enables the researcher to collect data from a large number of respondents at a single point in time and examine existing patterns of voting behavior among different gender groups. The design is appropriate for studies that seek to describe characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of a population and to establish relationships among variables. Given that the study focuses on assessing gender differences in voting participation, political preferences, and electoral choices among eligible voters in Funtua Local Government Area, the cross-sectional survey design provides an efficient means of obtaining quantitative data from a representative sample of the population. It also facilitates comparisons

between male and female respondents regarding their voting experiences and decision-making processes.

Results

The results of this study conducted in Funtua Local Government Area are presented in this section, combining quantitative findings with qualitative responses to provide a comprehensive understanding of gender differences in voting behavior. A total of 384 respondents participated in the study, and the analysis is organized according to the research objectives.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	208	54.2
	Female	176	45.8
Age	18–25	102	26.6
	26–35	124	32.3
	36–45	89	23.2
	46 and above	69	18.0
Education	No formal education	96	25.0
	Primary	88	22.9
	Secondary	112	29.2
	Tertiary	88	22.9

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The table shows that male respondents slightly outnumber female respondents, while the majority of respondents fall within the economically and politically active age group (26–35 years). Educational attainment varies, with a significant proportion having at least secondary education. Qualitative responses revealed that gender roles influence political exposure. A male respondent stated:

> As a man, I always try to participate in elections because it is part of my responsibility. Most of us discuss politics and candidates in the community, so it is easier for me to decide who to vote for.

In contrast, a female respondent noted:

> As a woman, I need permission from my family before I can go out, especially during elections.

Table 2: Gender and Voting Participation

Gender	Ever Voted (%)	Did Not Vote (%)
Male	85.6	14.4
Female	72.2	27.8

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The table indicates that men have a higher rate of voting participation compared to women in the study area. Qualitative responses support this finding. A respondent stated:

> Men are more exposed to political information because we gather in places like tea spots and markets where politics is discussed. Women are usually at home, so they don't get the same level of exposure.

Another female respondent added:

> Many women in this area are not fully informed about politics… they end up voting based on what their husbands or elders say.

Table 3: Factors Influencing Voting Behavior by Gender

Factor	Male (%)	Female (%)
Party loyalty	42.3	35.7
Candidate personality	28.5	31.4
Religious influence	18.2	22.6
Family influence	11.0	10.3

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The results show that party loyalty is the most influential factor among men, while women are more influenced by candidate personality and religious considerations. A respondent explained:

> For me, voting depends on the candidate's personality and what they promise. I don't just vote because of the party; I want someone who will improve our community.

Another respondent stated:

> Religion and community influence are very strong here. Sometimes, people are advised on who to vote for based on religious leaders or community opinion.

Table 4: Chi-Square Test of Relationship between Gender and Voting Behavior

Test Statistic	Value	df	p-value
Chi-square (χ^2)	6.84	1	0.009

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The chi-square test indicates a statistically significant relationship between gender and voting behavior ($p < 0.05$), confirming that gender significantly influences voting participation in the study area. Qualitative responses further reinforce this result. A respondent remarked:

> Women in this area are not as active in politics as men because of cultural expectations and limited opportunities to participate.

It is therefore inferred that there is clear gender differences in voting behavior in Funtua Local Government Area. Men exhibit higher voting participation, greater political exposure, and stronger engagement in political discussions, while women face socio-cultural constraints that limit their participation. Additionally, voting decisions differ by gender, with men more influenced by party loyalty and women more influenced by candidate personality, religion, and family considerations. The statistical analysis confirms that these differences are significant, and the qualitative data provides deeper insight into the social and cultural factors underlying these patterns.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal clear gender differences in voting behavior in Funtua Local Government Area, both in terms of participation and the factors influencing electoral choices. The higher level of voter participation among male respondents compared to females aligns with existing literature that identifies persistent gender gaps in political participation, particularly in patriarchal and traditional societies (Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Stockemer & Sundström, 2019). This suggests that despite global progress toward gender equality in political engagement, structural and socio-cultural barriers continue to limit women's participation in certain contexts. The qualitative findings provide further insight into these disparities, indicating that men have greater exposure to political discussions and access to information due to their participation in

public spaces such as markets and social gatherings. This observation supports the argument that political socialization and access to informal political networks significantly shape voting behavior (Campbell et al., 1960). In contrast, women's limited access to such spaces, combined with socio-cultural expectations that restrict their mobility and autonomy, reduces their likelihood of active political engagement. These findings are consistent with Adeleke and Ajani (2020), who noted that cultural and religious norms in Northern Nigeria significantly constrain women's political participation.

The study also found that gender influences the factors that guide voting decisions. While male respondents were more likely to prioritize party loyalty, female respondents tended to focus more on candidate personality, religious considerations, and family influence. This supports the argument that voting behavior is not uniform but is shaped by differing social experiences and access to political information. It also aligns with the rational choice perspective, which suggests that individuals make voting decisions based on perceived benefits and available information (Downs, 1957). In this context, women's reliance on interpersonal and socio-cultural cues may reflect limited access to broader political information and engagement.

The significant relationship between gender and voting behavior, as indicated by the chi-square test, further confirms that gender is a key determinant of electoral participation in the study area. This finding is consistent with Okafor and Fagbemi (2021), who observed similar gender disparities in political participation within Nigeria. However, unlike their study, which focused on southwestern Nigeria, the present study provides context-specific evidence from Northern Nigeria, where cultural and religious influences are more pronounced, thereby adding to the existing body of knowledge.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data highlights the role of socio-cultural structures in shaping gender differences in voting behavior. The responses from participants indicate that women's political participation is often mediated by family approval, religious influence, and societal expectations. These factors contribute to lower levels of political autonomy among women, reinforcing existing gender inequalities in electoral participation. This finding is also supported by reports from the Independent National Electoral Commission (2023), which highlight regional disparities in voter turnout, particularly in Northern Nigeria. Therefore, findings of this study confirm that gender plays a significant role in shaping voting behavior, influencing both participation rates and decision-making processes. The study contributes to the understanding of how socio-cultural, economic, and informational factors intersect with gender to influence political behavior in Funtua Local Government Area. It also underscores the need for targeted interventions aimed at addressing the barriers that limit women's participation in the electoral process, thereby promoting more inclusive and equitable democratic participation.

Conclusion

This study examined gender differences in voting behavior in Funtua Local Government Area, with findings revealing clear disparities between male and female respondents in both voter participation and the factors influencing their electoral decisions. The results indicate that men are more actively involved in voting and political discussions, while women face socio-cultural, informational, and structural barriers that limit their participation. Furthermore, the study established that gender significantly influences voting behavior, as evidenced by the statistical analysis and supported by qualitative responses. Men were found to be more influenced by party loyalty and political structures, whereas women relied more on candidate personality, religious considerations, and family influence. Overall, the study concludes that gender remains a critical

determinant of voting behavior in the study area, shaped largely by socio-cultural norms, access to information, and social expectations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends as follows;

1. Enhanced Civic and Political Education: Government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and electoral bodies such as the Independent National Electoral Commission should intensify voter education programs, particularly targeting women, to improve their political awareness and participation.
2. Promotion of Gender Inclusiveness in Politics: Policies should be implemented to encourage and support women's participation in political processes, including leadership positions and electoral activities, to bridge the gender gap in political participation.
3. Community Sensitization Programs: Traditional and religious leaders should be engaged to help challenge restrictive cultural norms that limit women's political participation and to promote inclusive attitudes toward voting and civic engagement.
4. Improved Access to Political Information: Efforts should be made to ensure that women have equal access to political information through media, community outreach, and digital platforms, reducing the information gap between genders.
5. Encouragement of Women's Political Autonomy: Programs that promote women's empowerment, including education and economic independence, should be strengthened to enhance their ability to make independent voting decisions.

These recommendations, if effectively implemented, will contribute to reducing gender disparities in voting behavior and promote more inclusive democratic participation in Nigeria.

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