

African Journal for the Psychological Studies of Social Issues

Volume 29 Number 3, AUGUST, 2026 Edition

Founding Editor- in - Chief: Professor Denis C.E. Ugwuegbu
(Retired Professor of Department of Psychology.
University of Ibadan.)

Editor- in - Chief: Professor Shyngle K. Balogun.
Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan.

Associate Editor: Professor. Benjamin O. Ehigie
Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan.

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Professor S. S. Babalola	University of South Africa
Professor S.E. Idemudia	University of South Africa
Professor Tope Akinawo	Adekunle Ajasin University, Nigeria
Professor O.A Ojedokun	Adekunle Ajasin University, Nigeria
Professor Catherine O Chowwen	University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Professor. Grace Adejunwon	University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Professor. A.M. Sunmola	University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Professor. B. Nwankwo	Caritas University, Nigeria
Professor. K.O. Taiwo	Lagos State University, Nigeria
Professor. Bayo Oluwole	University of Ibadan, Nigeria

A FEMINIST DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF GENDERED VERBAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIAN POLITICS: THE AKPABIO AKPOTI-UDUAGHAN DEBATE

¹**Edith Abisola AWOGU-MADUAGWU**

Department of Languages and General Studies, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria
Email: maduagwu@covenantuniversity.edu.ng
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-0303-3089

²**Celestina Ekene CHUKWUDI**

Department of Political Science and International Relations, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria
Email: celestina.chukwudi@covenantuniversity.edu.ng
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0627-2210>

³**Olaide Eunice AYOLE**

Department of Languages and General Studies, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria
Email: olaide.ayole@covenantuniversity.edu.ng
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-9354-0550>

⁴**Racheal Tijesunimi ADEWUNMI**

Department of Political Science and International Relations, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria
Email: racheal.adewunmi@covenantuniversity.edu.ng
Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3405-9495>

⁵**Patricia Awa TAIWO**

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Science
University of Abuja
orcid.org/0000/0003-3795-2972

Corresponding Author

Edith Abisola Awogu-Maduagwu
Email: maduagwu@covenantuniversity.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

This study examines gendered verbal violence in Nigerian politics through a feminist discourse analysis of the public exchanges surrounding Godswill Akpabio and Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan. Contrary to the background of persistent patriarchal structures in African political institutions, women in leadership positions continue to encounter unfriendly rhetoric, symbolic intimidation, and linguistic demotion that undermine democratic inclusion. The problem addressed by this study is the normalization of sexist verbal aggression within Nigerian political discourse and its implications for women's political participation. The aim of the study is to investigate the linguistic patterns of gendered verbal violence, examine the power relations embedded in political exchanges, and evaluate their broader socio-political implications. Using the Feminist Standpoint Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, the research adopts a qualitative methodology that involves textual and contextual analyses of media reports, interviews, parliamentary reactions, and online commentaries related to the discussion. Findings show that male politicians used political language as an instrument of patriarchal dominance through mockery, delegitimization, and gender stereotyping targeted at female politicians in the political institution. The study concludes that gendered verbal violence weakens democratic rules and causes political apathy among women. It recommends firmer parliamentary ethical codes, gender-sensitive political communication policies, and institutional reforms promoting inclusive political engagement. The study further highlights the need for policy-driven protection against verbal misogyny in Nigerian democratic institutions.

Keyword: Gendered Verbal Violence, Feminist Discourse Analysis, Nigerian Politics, Patriarchal Power, Political Misogyny

INTRODUCTION

Gendered effect is most common in African political systems, where patriarchal rules continue to form leadership structures, political communication, and institutional culture (Nartey, 2024). In Nigeria, despite the constitution stating the requirements for equality among all and promoting advocacy for women's political inclusion, female politicians continue to frequently face verbal hostility, exclusion, and discursive violence across formal and informal political places. Evidence from recent research shows that gender-based violence in public and political life is not only physical but also linguistic, manifesting in different ways such as derogatory speeches sexist framing, and rhetorical strategies that undermine women's legitimacy in governance (Ejiaso, 2024). Language is a central instrument for constructing and maintaining.

Critical discourse scholars argue that discourse is never neutral; rather, it reflects and reproduces ideological structures of domination and inequality (Fairclough, 2013). In feminist discourse scholarship, language is regarded as a place where patriarchal power is endorsed and sustained through everyday communicative performs that normalize women's subordination (Lazar, 2007). Recent studies on Nigerian political communication confirm that women in leadership are unreasonably unprotected towards verbal aggression, online misogyny, and delegitimizing rhetoric, particularly when they challenge dominant male politicians or institutions (Godwin, 2025; Nnoruga, 2025).

Sociologically, the ignoring of women in Nigerian politics is not just a product of low number representation but is constant through "institutionalized microaggressions" that create an unfriendly climate for female leadership (Awogu-Maduagwu, Umunnakwe, 2018; Erikson & Josefsson, 2024; Osimen, Bello, Adedeji, Awogu-Maduagwu, Pokuba, (2025). When female legislators are publicly scolded or told to "talk only when talked to" under the excuse of upholding order, it supports a symbolic eradication of female work.

Current studies claim that these interactions produce a "chilling effect" across the Nigerian political ecosystem, signalling to aspiring female leaders that the hallowed chambers are a position of certain harassment rather than collaborative governance (Bjarnegård & Kenny, 2024; Edward & Ahiakwo, 2025). This sociological barrier persists because the Nigerian legislative architecture was historically designed as a "masculine playing field" in which docility is expected, and assertiveness is penalized (Erikson & Josefsson, 2024).

The growing visibility of gendered verbal violence in Nigerian politics has been improved by high-profile political controversies, including the public discourse involving Godswill Akpabio and Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan. Political language can be deployed as an instrument of intimidation, silencing, and reputational harm against female politicians; thus, this discussion captivated national and international attention.

According to recent research, which states that such occasions are not isolated but reflect broader structural patterns of misogyny embedded within Nigerian governance and political communication systems (Ibitoye & Afolabi, 2025). Additionally, developing research states that gendered verbal violence in African politics goes beyond organized settings into digital spaces, where women politicians are subjected to increased harassment, hate speech, and coordinated discursive attacks (Chiluwa, 2024; Faniyi, 2024).

The patriarchal patterns are strengthened through all these ideologies that build political leadership as distinctively masculine while describing confident women as being rude, unsuitable,

or incompetent for leadership positions. The cumulative outcome is a communicative situation that discourages women's participation and weakens democratic inclusivity. Though scholarship on gender and politics in Nigeria has stretched meaningfully, most studies concentrate on organizational barriers such as electoral violence, cultural restrictions, and underrepresentation of women in governance (Akiyode-Afolabi & Arogundade, 2003; Okoosi-Simbine, 2006).

Inadequate attention has been paid to the discursive and linguistic dimensions of exclusion, particularly how verbal violence acts as a subtle yet powerful mechanism of political marginalization (Nartey, 2024). Current feminist critical discourse studies stress that language-based violence is a critical but not well explored factor shaping women's political experiences in Nigeria (Ejiaso, 2024). The frequent use of gendered verbal violence has critical implications for democratic governance. It not only diminishes women's confidence and causes political apathy but also changes the principles of equality, representation, and inclusion that reinforce democratic systems. In places where sexist rhetoric is a norm, women are often forced to navigate political spaces characterized by resentment, embarrassment, and ideological resistance to their authority.

This reinforces structural inequalities and limits the positive potential of women's leadership in governance. Contrary to this background, this study investigates gendered verbal violence in Nigerian politics through a feminist discourse analysis of the Akpabio Akpoti-Uduaghan debate. The research examines how language, ideology, and power meet in political communication to imitate patriarchal supremacy and sideline female political agency. By applying Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, the study seeks to reveal the linguistic strategies, rhetorical patterns, and ideological assumptions embedded in political discourse, media framing, and public commentary surrounding the controversy.

The study is significant because it contributes to the growing body of feminist political communication scholarship by foregrounding language as a site of political exclusion and gendered power struggle. It also provides empirical insight into how verbal violence operates as a mechanism of democratic erosion in Nigeria.

Ultimately, the study offers policy-relevant recommendations to promote gender-sensitive political communication, strengthen institutional accountability, and foster inclusive democratic governance. This research connects the discourse on verbal violence to democratic exclusion in Africa by expanding feminist political discourse. The research is also a contribution to existing data to Nigerian-centered discourse analysis on misogyny in politics and support for the application of Critical Discourse analysis within African Political policies and governance studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Gendered verbal violence is about the primary use of language, humiliation, insults, symbolic intimidation, and stereotypes, to increase patriarchal domination and discriminate against individuals based on gender identification. In political and technical spaces, it emerges through sexist rhetoric, verbal abuse, misogynistic backlash, and discursive practices aimed at silencing or delegitimizing women's authority and participation. Contemporary scholarship contends that such violence sustains uneven power relations, weakens democratic inclusion, and discourages women's participation in governance and public debate (Udupa & Koch, 2024; Jalalzai et al., 2022; Proust & Saldaña, 2023).

Verbal aggression comprises intimidating and hostile acts such as insults, scorn, ridicule, threats, and derogatory labeling, intentionally adopted to damage an individual's dignity, credibility, or emotional well-being. In political environments, verbal aggression is always gendered and primarily used to quell, intimidate, and delegitimize women leaders by questioning their capacity, morality, emotional competence, and leadership ability. Scholars contend that such debate violence strengthens patriarchal power corporations, discourages female political engagement, and makes normal misogynistic political discourse within democratic bodies (Godwin, 2025; Krook & Restrepo Sanín, 2020; Jalalzai et al., 2022).

Linguistic sexism is the employment of language that promotes gender discrimination by stereotyping or exclusion of certain terms, thus giving value to masculinity over femininity (Nartey, 2024). Symbolic violence is a term that was coined in critical social theory to describe covert methods through language use that perpetuates inequality without direct physical force. Symbolic violence occurs in the field of political discourse when women are consistently portrayed as subordinate politicians or underrepresented through linguistic practice (Fairclough, 2013).

Lastly, political sexism refers to the deliberate attack against women politicians through verbal aggression that can be communicated through social media platforms. Several recent studies have shown that women politicians in Africa face an unusually high number of verbal assaults from their male colleagues, especially if they hold positions that are visible or influential (Chiluwa, 2024).

Patriarchy and Political Communication

In Nigeria, patriarchy remains a crucial distinction of political structures. It is characterized by male dominance in decision-making structures and the regularization of masculine authority as the usual for leadership. Within such systems, political communication becomes masculinized, privileging assertiveness, aggression, and dominance as acceptable communicative styles (Lazar, 2007).

Masculinized political spaces often sideline women by framing leadership characters in gendered terms that exclude or diminish femininity. As a result, women politicians are frequently subjected to inspection that is not applied to their male counterparts, particularly regarding tone, emotional expression, and appearance (Faniyi, 2024). Gendered language in politics strengthens these inequalities by viewing women as outsiders within governance places, thereby legitimizing their exclusion through discourse rather than formal policy.

Recent research shows that patriarchal discourse in African politics operates through both obvious and concealed linguistic tactics, including interruptions, dismissive remarks, and gendered metaphors that undermine women's authority (Ibitoye & Afolabi, 2025). These communicative practices aid the support of male dominance in governance institutions.

Women and Political Participation in Nigeria

The participation of women in politics has historically been controlled by culture, structure, and institutional barriers. From the colonial period to contemporary democratic governance, women have remained diminished in elective and appointive positions (Akiyode-Afolabi & Arogundade, 2003). Cultural norms that give importance to male leadership have further strengthened women's exclusion from political decision-making processes.

Structural barriers are also one of the significant tools used to exclude women from politics, they include limited access to political funding, party marginalization, electoral violence, and weak enforcement of gender equality policies. Despite global and regional commitments to gender inclusion, Nigeria continues to record low female representation in legislative and executive positions (Okoosi-Simbine, 2006).

Contemporary challenges have also evolved to include digital harassment and discursive violence, where women politicians face coordinated online attacks and sexist commentary aimed at undermining their credibility. Recent studies highlight that such forms of hostility discourage women from active political engagement and reinforce political disengagement among aspiring female leaders (Nnoruga, 2025)

Feminist Discourse Analysis

Feminist Discourse Analysis (FDA), mostly its critical variant, studies how language constructs, maintains, and challenges gendered power relations. It is grounded in the understanding that discourse is a position of ideological reproduction where social inequalities are produced and sustained through linguistic practices (Lazar, 2007).

The FDA approach places emphasis on the connection between power and language. According to this theory, all political discourse is always filled with power. It is always non-neutral since it occurs against the setting of power. Under the FDA, language is studied as an instrument of reproduction of patriarchal ideologies in politics and communication (Fairclough, 2013). A key issue addressed by Feminist Discourse Analysis is that of ideological reproduction in which the dominant ideologies of gender are reproduced through the language used in daily interaction. This is especially manifested when women are portrayed as incapable or unreasonable, and hence unfit for positions of authority (Nartey, 2024).

Therefore, Feminist Discourse Analysis offers an insightful perspective for analyzing political language and its implications for power relations. It is suitable for analyzing gendered verbal violence, as it points out how linguistic choices contribute to larger systems of gender inequality

Empirical Review

Empirical studies on gendered political communication show a huge figure of evidence on sexism, media bias, and verbal hostility against women in the political system in Nigeria.

Studies done in Africa reveal that female politicians frequently encounter gender-based abuse and derogatory speeches both formally and informally (Chiluwa, 2024). In this case, social media portrayal tends to amplify such abuse by focusing on the politician's looks, emotions, or personal life rather than their political abilities.

Globally, studies focused on sexism in parliament reveal higher levels of interruptions, dismissals, and ridicule of women legislators than their male counterparts (Godwin, 2025). This evidence proves that sexism in political discourse cannot be limited to certain contexts but can be considered a common institutional trend.

Online political harassment studies confirm the existence of increased verbal violence targeting female politicians in online settings, where anonymity contributes to the spread of misogynist discourse (Faniyi, 2024). Online social networks have therefore become essential sites for

gender-based verbal abuse reproduction. (Chukwudi, 2023; Chukwudi, Bello, Apeloko, Olawunmi, 2024).

Empirical findings from Nigerian research indicate that media portrayal of women in politics tends to spread stereotypical depictions and positions women politicians in the patriarchal narrative of incompetence and emotionality (Ibitoye & Afolabi, 2025).

Although research in this field is expanding, there are still major areas of concern. First, there is a need for a Nigeria-focused discourse analysis of language-based political exclusion, which is yet to be fulfilled. Secondly, many existing studies focus primarily on structural factors of political participation while ignoring language-based factors. Thirdly, limited attention has been given to high-profile political debates as sites of gendered discourse analysis, particularly within legislative or elite political contexts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA)

The study is anchored on Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that mixes feminist theory with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how language reproduces gendered power relations. FCDA is concerned with how discourse tolerates patriarchal domination, marginalizes women, and legitimizes unequal gender relations in social and political contexts (Lazar, 2007). It is mainly a useful tool for analyzing political communication where language becomes a site of ideological struggle and gendered power negotiation.

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis was primarily credited to Michelle M. Lazar for her role in developing Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) as an expansion of CDA from a feminist point of view. (Lazar 2005, 2007) has helped in the development of FCDA by applying a feminist approach in discourse analysis in order to reveal gender ideologies that exist in institutional discourse. FCDA is a branch of the larger discourse analysis called CDA, which was created by scholars such as Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk, who focus on the connection between language, ideology, and power. However, FCDA spreads its work by explicitly foregrounding gender as a central analytical category (Lazar, 2007).

Firstly, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis assumes that language is one kind of social practice. Discourse does not simply represent reality but constitutes social relations and identities in ways that include gender identities (Fairclough, 2013). Power is created and sustained discursively. Institutions and political power are established through linguistic practices that favour particular social groups, especially men. Gender is socially constructed through discourse and is reproduced through everyday communication.

Gender inequalities are not biological facts but rise from linguistic practices and reproduce themselves (Lazar, 2007). FCDA is also based on the notion of patriarchy that is reproduced ideologically through linguistic processes. Gender ideologies are made dominant through repetitions in discourse that ignore the presence of women. In this case study, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis is applied to examine gendered violence verbally in Nigerian politics, specifically in the discourse about the public exchange of words between Godswill Akpabio and Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan. The theory is employed in order to explore gender-based verbal violence using sexist language, mocking, and offensive utterances in political discourse. Also, Patriarchal political language explains linguistic practices that maintain dominance of men in governance. It looks at power relationships in discourse in order to reveal the construction of

authority in language. Lastly, Discursive marginalization examines how women are linguistically excluded or silenced in political communication.

Through the FCDA framework, the study interrogates media texts, political statements, and public commentary to reveal how language operates as an instrument of symbolic violence and gendered exclusion in Nigerian politics. This framework provides a robust theoretical lens for examining gendered verbal violence in Nigerian politics. By combining feminist theory with CDA, it enables a deep interrogation of how patriarchal power is reproduced through language, particularly in political institutions where women's voices are often downgraded. Its application to the Akpabio Akpoti-Uduaghan discourse offers valuable insight into the linguistic mechanisms of gender inequality in governance. The relationship between the study and the theoretical framework is presented in figure 1.

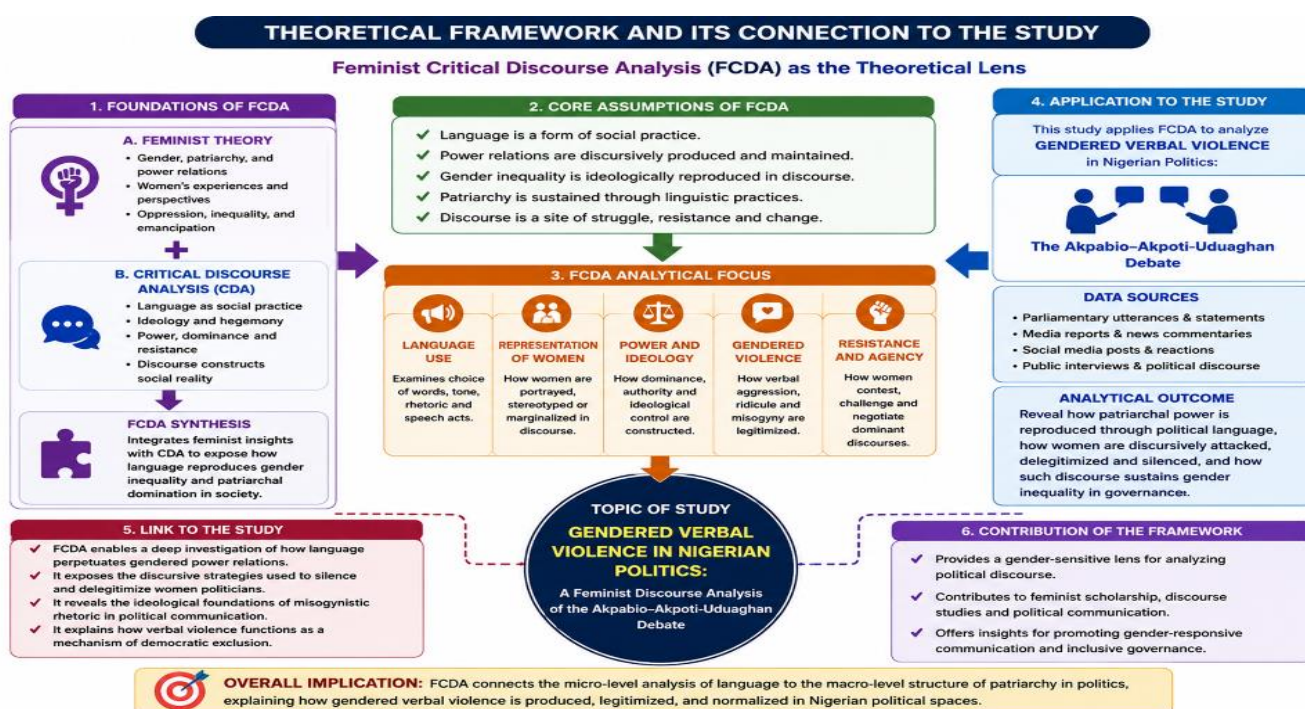


Figure 1: Summary of the theory and topic of study
Source: Authors' Source

The diagram in Figure 1 presents Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis as a theoretical lens, linking feminist theory and CDA, outlining core assumptions, analytical focus on language, power, gendered violence, application to Nigerian politics, data sources, contributions, and overall implications on patriarchal political discourse structures.

Contextual Overview of the Debate

The public display between Godswill Akpabio and Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan came from within a wider Nigerian political climate featured by serious worries over gender imbalance, political intolerance, and patriarchal domination in Nigeria governance institutions. The disagreement attracted national attention after contentious political declarations, media interviews, and public commentaries generated debates concerning sexism, abuse of power, and the treatment of women in Nigerian politics. The debate rapidly moved from parliamentary and institutional areas

into social media online platform, where competing interpretations of the incident increased public division.

The debate happened against the backdrop of heightened campaigns for women's political engagement in Nigeria and continual criticism of male-dominated political bodies. Scholars perceive that Nigerian politics persist heavily masculinized, with women sometimes subjected to increased scrutiny and hostility when seated in a visible political position (Nnoruga, 2025). The Akpabio–Akpoti-Uduaghan discourse became representative of wider structural conflicts regarding authority, gender, and legitimacy within the governance system.

Looking at it from Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, the disagreement tells how language work as an approach of ideological control and patriarchal encouragement. Political statements, public reactions, and media framing collectively created a argumentative environment in which female political body was subjected to conflict and symbolic regulation (Lazar, 2007).

MANIFESTATIONS OF GENDERED VERBAL VIOLENCE

Ridicule and Trivialization

A single major manifestation of gendered verbal violence within the debate was the use of ridicule and downplaying to weaken female political legitimacy. Female assertiveness was always framed as sentimental instability or excessive habit. Statements and behaviours surrounding the controversy often reduce substantive political cases by changing attention toward personality and emotional manifestation rather than governance worries.

This is in tandem with Fairclough's (2013) contention that discourse can normalize uneven power relations through notable ordinary communicative activities. The undermining of women's political worries functions ideologically to present female politicians as incapable of rational governance.

Gender Stereotyping

Gender stereotypes were continuously seen in media discourse and online statements surrounding the discussion. Akpoti-Uduaghan was always represented through stereotypical speech related to femininity, emotiveness, and defiance. Such representations reflect patriarchal assumptions that women who dare to challenge male authority are rude.

Recent studies indicates that gender stereotyping continues as a dominant feature of political discourse in African democracies, where women are sometimes examined based on gender expectations instead of competence (Ibitoye & Afolabi, 2025). Within the discursive mechanism, the perception is encouraged that political authority is originally masculine, while female resistance is not normal.

Silencing Tactics

Silencing devices also became prominent within the discussion. Interruptions, responses, and dismissive attempts to delegitimize female expressions worked as a strategy for restricting women's engagement in political dialogue. Such tactics comply with what Lazar (2007) noted as discursive intimidation, where institutional communication systems marginalize female voices through linguistic management.

The framing of assertive female speech as confrontational further encouragement to symbolic silencing because it discourages women from participating freely in politics. In a patriarchal

political system, women are sometimes expected to behave to submissive communicative norms, and shift from these expectations brings hostility.

Delegitimization of Female Competence

Another persisting pattern was the delegitimization of female ability. Public commentary always questioned the credibility, emotive stability, and political growth of the female political actor included in the talks. Such discursive activities function to sabotage women's authority and bolster patriarchal assumptions about leadership ability.

Women politicians in African political debate are often portrayed as lacking the rationality and good conduct associated with political governance (Chiluwa, 2024). Women are considered politically incompetent through these institutional discrimination ideologies.

Symbolic Intimidation and Emotional Framing

Symbolic intimidation happened through aggressive rhetorical trends intended to build hierarchical power associations. Political language was primarily deployed to implement masculine domineering and discouraging resistance. Simultaneously, emotional framing presents the female politician as highly emotional, thereby sabotaging the legitimacy of her political status. Such emotional framing shows broader patriarchal debate that relates rationality with masculinity and emotive with femininity (Faniyi, 2024). The consequence is that women's political reactions are interpreted as emotional responses instead of legitimate political interventions.

Patriarchal Power and Political Language

The discourse surrounding the contestation demonstrates how political language recreates patriarchal power system within Nigerian governance. Dominance system were seen in the unequal allocation of discursive authority, where male political voices achieved greater institutional legitimacy and public support. Masculine authority was boosted through rhetorical strategies stressing hierarchy, control, and institutional preeminence. Political language is not just a tool for communication but a mechanism for power consolidation. Through discursive acts of masculine dominance, was normalized while female opposition was tagged as inappropriate. Institutional support of male power also happened within the debate. Responses from political associates, sections of the media, and institutional actors, frequently prioritized preserving institutional hierarchy over addressing worries regarding sexist rhetoric. This shows van Dijk's (2015) assertion that elite discourse often causes existing power structures by accepting dominant groups while discriminating against dissenting voices. The contestation then demonstrates how patriarchal ideas is rooted in political communication and sustained through institutional discourse activities that privilege male power.

Media Amplification and Public Reactions

Traditional media played a critical role in amplifying the dispute through selective framing and sensational statements. Media narratives often stressed interpersonal disputes rather than systematic gender issues, thereby depoliticizing concerns about verbal violence and institutional sexism. Research reveals that media framing essentially influences public views of women politicians by reinforcing gender stereotypes and forming interpretations of female governance (Nartey, 2024). In this case, some media portrayals subtly reproduced patriarchal narratives by showing the controversy as personality-driven rather than systematically gendered. Social media heightened the discourse through misogynistic statements, trolling, and divided reactions. Digital platforms became spaces where sexist abuse, ridicule, and delegitimizing narratives popularly circulated. Chiluwa (2024) notes that online political debate in Africa increasingly works as a site of gendered enmity where anonymity facilitates aggressive misogynistic utterances.

Public reactions to discourse reflect intensify ideological divisions. While some groups condemned verbal conflict against women in politics, others justified such hostility as ordinary political confrontation. This division reveals broader societal conflict regarding gender balance and women's authority in governance.

Implications for Democratic Participation

The continued gendered verbal violence has heightened implications for democratic engagements and governance in Nigeria. One major influence is the discouragement of female political desire. Hostile communicative environments lessen women's willingness to engage in politics because fear of humiliation, psychological intimidation, and reputational attacks. Gendered political intimidation also undermines public trust in democratic agencies. When political structure appears tolerant of misogynistic rhetoric, citizens may view governance structures as exclusionary and uneven. This worsens democratic legitimacy and public confidence in institutional fairness. Inclusive governance is similarly influenced because verbal violence limits meaningful participation by women in decision-making arrangements. Democratic systems rely on diversity, representation, and equal participation; then, communicative exclusion undermines democratic development. The normalization of sexist political rhetoric sends threats to democratic ethics by legitimizing abuse, intolerance, and symbolic violence within leadership spaces. As feminist scholars contend, democracy cannot progress in environments where structural imbalance and gendered exclusion remain foundational in institutional discourse (Lazar, 2007).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from this reveals that gendered verbal violence in Nigerian politics work as a discursive strategy for upholding patriarchal dominance and checking female political participation. Through the lens of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), the study highlights that language within the Akpabio–Akpoti–Uduaghan discourse was not merely communicative but ideological, working to reinforce uneven gender relations and institutional arrangements. This complies with Critical Discourse Analysis assumptions that discourse both shows and reproduces power system in society (Fairclough, 2013).

One major discovery is that verbal violence works as a form of political control. Discursive tactics such as mockery, delegitimization, interruption, and emotive framing were deployed to undermine female political authority and increase masculine dominance. These findings promote Lazar's (2007) contend that patriarchal debate systematically place women as subordinate political players through linguistic practices that normalize marginalization. The outcome further corroborates Chilwa's (2024) observation that political discourse in African contexts increasingly weaponizes language opposing women through symbolic intimidation and public abuse. In solving this abuse the importance of community and human development at the grassroots was suggested (Chukwudi, Owoh (2024; Ezebuilo, Chukwudi, Obiora, & Ofuonye, (2025).

The study also implements that political language supports the linguistic creation of patriarchy. Gender stereotypes rooted in public commentary and media narratives promoted ideological assumptions that governance and authority are masculine features. Female assertiveness was framed as emotive excess or insubordination, then legitimizing patriarchal desires of female submissiveness. This discovery is consistent with Nartey's (2024) study, which reveal that discourse concerning women in African political spaces sometimes reproduces gender hierarchies through subtle linguistic choices and representational mechanisms.

Another important finding concerns the institutional acceptance of misogyny. The study indicated that sexist political rhetoric is always tolerated within governance agencies and media structures. Rather than daring gendered hostility, institutional reactions often prioritize political hierarchy and elite union. This promotes van Dijk's (2015) assertion that elite debate typically protects dominant

power system while marginalizing dissenting voices. In the same vein, Ibitoye and Afolabi (2025) argue that Nigerian media portrayal of women in politics often bolster patriarchal ideologies by trivializing worries about gendered abuse. Generally, the findings reveals that gendered verbal violence is not neglected communicative behavior but a structural mechanism of democratic exclusion. Through discourse, patriarchal bodies regulate political legitimacy, silence female efforts, and sustain masculine authority within Nigerian governance. Comparison of the overview of selected African countries is presented in table 1

Table 1: Comparative Cases of Gendered Verbal Violence in African Politics

Country	Political Actors / Case	Nature of Gendered Verbal Violence	Similarity to Akpabio–Akpoti-Uduaghan Discourse	Socio-Political Implication
Nigeria	Godswill Akpabio and Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan	Public verbal exchanges involving ridicule, dismissal, and gendered attacks against a female politician	Patriarchal delegitimization of female political agency through verbal intimidation	Reinforces misogyny in political institutions and discourages women's participation
South Africa	Julius Malema versus Lindiwe Mazibuko	Sexist remarks and patronizing rhetoric questioning competence and authority	Female politician framed as emotionally weak or politically incapable	Undermines women's credibility in opposition politics
Kenya	Martha Karua and male political elites during electoral campaigns	Verbal hostility, sexist insults, and online misogynistic attacks	Female assertiveness portrayed negatively within patriarchal political culture	Intensifies barriers to women's electoral participation
Zimbabwe	Thokozani Khupe versus factions within the opposition party	Public humiliation, gender stereotyping, and verbal exclusion from leadership legitimacy	Women leaders delegitimized through sexist discourse during power struggles	Weakens inclusivity within democratic opposition movements
Uganda	Stella Nyanzi versus state political actors	Gendered insults, moral attacks, and public shaming targeted at outspoken women	Verbal aggression used to discipline dissenting female voices	Restricts freedom of expression and female activism
Tanzania	Samia Suluhu Hassan during early presidency debates	Comments questioning emotional capability and leadership strength because of gender	Female leadership evaluated through patriarchal stereotypes	Demonstrates persistence of sexist political narratives even at executive level
Zambia	Princess Kasune and online political critics	Misogynistic online rhetoric and personal attacks on women in politics	Use of verbal violence to intimidate politically active women	Discourages young women from political engagement
Ghana	Sarah Adwoa Safo and parliamentary critics	Public ridicule and gender-coded criticism over political decisions	Women politicians judged through moralistic and	Reinforces unequal standards for male and female politicians

			gendered expectations	
Malawi	Joyce Banda during and after presidency	Sexist commentary portraying leadership as incompatible with femininity	Female authority challenged through patriarchal verbal framing	Normalizes discrimination against women leaders
Liberia	Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and political opponents	Derogatory rhetoric questioning female leadership legitimacy	Women leaders subjected to scrutiny rooted in gender stereotypes	Highlights enduring patriarchal resistance to female political authority
Ethiopia	Birtukan Mideksa versus ruling elites	Verbal delegitimization and symbolic intimidation against a female opposition figure	Political dissent intersected with misogynistic framing	Suppresses female opposition participation
Senegal	Aminata Touré and political rivals	Public attacks questioning temperament and suitability for leadership	Gendered framing of ambition as aggression	Limits acceptance of assertive female political leadership

Source: Fairclough, N. (1992) Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2023), UN Women. (2021), Krook, M. L. (2017), Gqola, P. D. (2015), Mlambo, C., & Kapingura, F. (2019). Ahikire, J. (2014). Mikell, G. (2018). Amnesty International. (2021). International IDEA. (2022),

The table shows certain African political cases relating to gendered verbal violence against female politicians and popular individuals. It highlights trends of misogynistic rhetoric, patriarchal delegitimization, symbolic intimidation, and sexist political statements across African democracies, demonstrating how verbal violence dents women's political engagement, leadership legitimacy, and inclusive democratic control

Limitations of the Study

The scope of this research is limited to the controversy surrounding the Godswill Akpabio-Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan debate and takes its data primarily from publicly available media texts, political statements, and online responses. The qualitative approach may adopt interpretive subjectivity in the analysis of ideological messages framed within political discourse.

Suggestions for Further Study

Further studies should investigate similar exploitation of political power across African patriarchal structures of governance, using multimodal analysis. It will be interesting to compare audience reception, the effect of misogyny on the mental health of women politicians and the role of digital media algorithms in sensationalizing sexism in political discourse.

Conclusion

This paper examines gendered verbal violence in Nigerian politics through the case study of Godswill Akabio – Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, using the theoretical lens of Feminist Critical discourse. What the findings revealed from the controversy is the employment of patriarchal power relations to stereotype, silence, intimidate and delegitimize female competence. The findings further revealed that verbal aggression against women is employed as a tool of political control and isolation. These issues justify the employment of the Feminist Critical Discourse

analysis for revealing how the use of language institutionalizes female domination and gender inequality in the structures of governance. Another concern revealed in this study is the tolerance of misogyny in politics, exemplified by the low inclusivity and representation of female voices in policymaking. As a contribution to scholarship, the study highlights language as a domain of gendered agency, power, and political exclusion of women. The conclusion is that verbal violence against women in politics weakens gender equity and inclusion, thereby infusing a culture of patriarchal oppression in Nigerian politics.

Recommendations

This research recommends that a gender sensitive code of ethics be enacted into legislation which should monitor misogynistic political utterance. Sanctions should be put in place to address such offences and ensure accountability. Ethical journalism should be enshrined in media reporting that clearly and boldly discourages the sensationalization and sexist projection of female politicians, while supporting communication that is integrative of all gender. Additionally, gender awareness programs and political communication training should be organized to teach the promotion of cordial democratic interactions. This teaching should be incorporated into school curriculum to ensure early knowledge among young ones on values of gender protection. This teachings should also be promoted in rural areas where patriarchal practices are more grounded among the locals. In the same vein, the campaign for gender sensitive political participation for women that is both safe and inclusive should be initiated by Civil Societies.

Policy Implications

The findings of this research have promising consequences for Nigerian Senate ethics reform, Electoral Communication policies, gender equality legislation, democratic governance frameworks, and political party policies. The research also encourages inclusive governance and gender sensitive participation by the broader African Union initiatives and across all African Democracies.

Statement of Interest Declaration

There are no competing interests of any kind for the writers.

Data Availability Statement

There is no data available for this study.

Declaration of Funding

No funding was received for this study

REFERENCES

- Ajayi, O. A. (2024). Pragmatics of violence: Violentization of our world through words. *Research in Pragmatics*, 3(3), 31–57.
- Akiyode-Afolabi, A., & Arogundade, L. (2003). *Gender audit: 2003 election and issues in women's political participation in Nigeria*. Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre.
- Chiluwa, I. (2024). Discourse, digitisation and women's rights groups in Nigeria and Ghana: Online campaigns for political inclusion and against violence on women and girls. *Discourse & Communication*, 18(1), 1–20.
- Chukwudi, C. E; Bello, M. A.; Apeloko, O. D & Olawunmi, K. (2024) Social Media Application within Organisational Productivity in a Democratic Setting: Evidence from the Public Sector in Nigeria. *Journal of African Films and Diaspora Studies (JAFDIS)*. 7(2), 113-137. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2516-2713/2024/7n2a7>
- Chukwudi, C. E. & Owoh, E. E. (2024). An assessment of the impacts of community development initiatives in Awgbu Town in Anambra State, Nigeria. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 5(4), 388-406. <https://doi.org/10.58256/tjgan262>
- Ejiaso, V. (2024). Linguistic violence on women: Representation of women in ritual killing discourse on Nigerian social media spaces. *Studies in Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis*, 5(1), 32–45.
- Ezebuilo, P., Chukwudi, C. E., Obiora, C. A., & Ofuonye, N. (2025). Youth Empowerment and Sustainable Development: An Assessment of the 'One Youth-Two Skills' Scheme in Anambra State, Nigeria. *Ianna Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, Volume 7, Number 2: 685-699. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15535402>
- Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Faniyi, O. M. (2024). Feminist political discourse and digital harassment in Nigeria. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 17(2), 1–18.
- Godwin, C. (2025). Gendered apologies in Nigerian politics: A discourse-pragmatic study of male and female politicians' public regret. *International Journal of Arts, Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies*, 14(3), 1–15.
- Godwin, T. O. (2025). Verbal aggression and political communication in emerging democracies. *African Journal of Political Communication*, 12(1), 44–59.
- Ibitoye, A. F., & Afolabi, A. F. (2025). Media representation of gender-based violence against women in Nigeria: A feminist critical discourse analysis. *International Journal of Humanities, Literature and Art Research*, 8(6), 1–14.
- Jalalzai, F., Krook, M. L., & Bjarnegård, E. (2022). Violence against women in politics: Global perspectives of a global issue. *Politics & Gender*, 18(1), 1–9.
- Krook, M. L., & Restrepo Sanín, J. (2020). The cost of doing politics Analyzing violence and harassment against female politicians. *Perspectives on Politics*, 18(3), 740–755.
- Lazar, M. M. (2005). Feminist critical discourse analysis: Gender, power and ideology in discourse. *Palgrave Macmillan*.
- Lazar, M. M. (2007). Feminist critical discourse analysis: Articulating a feminist discourse praxis. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 4(2), 141–164.
- Nartey, M. (2024). Women's voice, agency and resistance in Nigerian blogs: A feminist critical discourse analysis. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 33(4), 418–430.
- Nnoruga, J. N. (2025). Gender-based violence in Nigerian politics: Implications for democratic consolidation. *Journal of Igbo Language, Literature, Culture, and Religious Studies*, 1(2), 44–58.
- Okoosi-Simbine, A. T. (2006). Women in governance in Nigeria: The role of women in politics and decision-making. *Nigerian Journal of International Affairs*, 32(2), 81–93.
- Omotoso, S. A., & Olaronke, A. B. (2024). Tokenism and women's political communication in the pursuit of gender

- egalitarianism in Nigeria. *Communication, Culture and Critique*, 17(2), 127–136.
- Proust, C., & Saldaña, M. (2023). Gendered disinformation and misogynistic political communication in digital democracies. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 20(4), 315–329.
- Udupa, S., & Koch, L. (2024). Tackling online misogyny in political campaigns: Promise and limitations of artificial intelligence. *Feminist Media Studies*, 24(6), 1–7.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2015). *Discourse and knowledge: A sociocognitive approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2016). *Methods of critical discourse studies* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.