

WOMEN IN POLITICS: A PROGNOSIS OF THE NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

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Abstract

This study explores the issue of gender inequality in the Nigerian political sphere. Women, despite comprising approximately half of the Nigerian population, are notably underrepresented in the country's political arena. Thus, this paper examines the level of political participation among Nigerian women, analyzing the barriers they face through the lens of feminist theory. The theory posits that gender equality and balance between men and women are essential in all spheres of society, including the political, economic, and social spheres. The study utilized a qualitative methodology, relying on secondary data sources and conducting thematic analysis. Hence, drawing on the findings of this study, it is evident that there are numerous barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria, including the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society, political stereotypes, psychological, religious, political parties, political violence, socio-economic and cultural factor among others. Nonetheless, Nigerian women have long been integral contributors to Nigeria's socio-economic, political, cultural, and religious advancement. Comprising approximately 65% of the population, Nigerian women fulfill crucial roles as mothers, time managers, community organizers, and advocates in both social and political spheres. However, despite their significant contributions and sizable population, society has not fully acknowledged their importance. Furthermore, they have faced marginalization in terms of representation in government. To improve women's political representation in Nigeria, this paper recommends the full implementation of the 35% Affirmative Action policy, which seeks to increase women's representation in political positions. Furthermore, there is a need to raise awareness among voters and provide training for women to make gender equality a priority. Moreover, emphasizing the importance of collective struggle for both sexes is critical to overcoming societal gender-based prejudices.

Keywords: Gender Politics, Equality, Democracy and Political Participation

Introduction

Over the years, extensive discourse has taken place regarding the political participation of women in the political sphere and the necessity for their effective participation in politics in Nigeria. This issue has generated considerably more heated debates than resolving concerns related to gender inequality in terms of participatory involvement in progressive or developing nations (Erunke & Shiabu Umar Abdul, 2013).

Anifowose (2004) suggests that the prevalent male dominance can be attributed to physical disparities. Men typically possess greater physical attributes such as weight, height, and strength compared to women, enabling them to exert their will through physical force or the threat thereof more effectively. Conversely, women are perceived as weaker due to their biological role in childbirth and caregiving. Society tends to valorize men as strong and suitable for public roles, while women are often viewed as fragile and relegated to domestic spheres.

The United Nations took its first major international step in favor of women in 1946 by establishing a policy in the commission for the situation of women. In 1975, during the International Women's Year, the United Nations General Assembly established the United Nations Decade for Women and the Girl Child (Akinboye, 2004). In 1976, the United Nations Assembly once more initiated the creation of the Voluntary Fund for the UN Decade for Women with the aim of executing the objectives set forth for the Decade (Oyekanmi, 2004:44). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was also adopted and became effective in 1981. This convention and the effort of the UN laid the foundation for acknowledging gender equality by ensuring women's equal access to political and public life opportunities. On July 7, 1984, this was established, encompassing rights such as voting, running for office, education, health, and work. States parties committed to taking all necessary measures, including legislation and temporary special measures, to enable women to exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Countries that have ratified or acceded to the UN Convention are legally obligated to implement its provisions. Furthermore, the Beijing Conference in 1985 recommended a government representation of 30% women. In 1985, Nigeria joined the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), in addition to providing constitutional guarantees of gender equality.

Consequently, the pressing need to address these universal issues, the African Union adopted the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, also known as the Maputo Protocol, in 2003. It contains 32 Articles and came into effect in 2005 after being ratified by 15 AU member States. By 2019, it had been signed by 49 and ratified by 42 of the 55 AU members. The Maputo Protocol is considered one of the most comprehensive and progressive women's human rights instruments globally, guaranteeing extensive rights for African women and girls across various domains, including civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental realms. (The Maputo Protocol, 2003: 5). Nigeria, as an AU member state, signed the Maputo Protocol on December 16, 2003, and ratified it on December 16, 2004, demonstrating its commitment to advancing gender equality and safeguarding women's rights. However, despite this ratification, the Maputo Protocol has not been fully integrated into Nigeria's domestic legal framework, impeding the effective enforcement of its provisions.

Globally, 22 states have less than 10% female representation in their single or lower parliamentary houses, with one chamber having no female members at all. Achieving gender parity in national

legislative bodies is projected to take until 2063 at the current pace. In Latin America and the Caribbean, women hold 36% of parliamentary seats, while in Europe and Northern America, they make up 32% of parliamentarians. Sub-Saharan Africa has 26% female legislators, followed by Eastern and South-Eastern Asia with 22%, Oceania with 20%, Central and Southern Asia with 19%, and Northern Africa and Western Asia with 18% female Members of Parliament. (UN Women, 2013)

Women in positions of power should push for legislations and policies that give precedence to women's interests. Nevertheless, with more women occupying influential positions in strategic sectors of the economy, there is a higher likelihood that gender-related concerns will be given utmost priority. For instance, Rwanda has been recognized as the leading country globally in terms of the number of women in government positions (World Economic Forum, 2019). Rwanda also ranks high among countries with 50% or more female ministerial representation. Additionally, statistics reveal that Rwanda is among the top ten countries with substantial female political representation (Statista, 2018). This encouraging example demonstrates active female participation in shaping a nation's affairs. Such possibilities bring advantages and perspectives that are instrumental not only in formulating policies that prioritize gender issues but also in reflecting gender-related matters throughout the country. While Rwanda's achievements are commendable, it is unfortunate that women still hold a small percentage of decision-making positions in both public and private institutions in most societies worldwide. In order to achieve gender equality and genuine democracy, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women, 2013) emphasizes the need for increased women's engagement in politics.

Nigerian women exhibit one of the lowest levels of participation in the national legislature, standing at 5.9%, in contrast to many other African countries such as Uganda (34.6%), South Africa (43.2%), Ethiopia (27.7%), Cameroon (20%), Niger (12.3%), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (8.0%) (Daily Times, 18 May 2012). Specifically in Nigeria, women's involvement in political processes remains notably deficient, ranking at a mere 7%, the lowest globally (Onyegbula, 2013). Over time, the trend of women's participation in Nigerian politics has been predominantly negative, despite the dynamic political landscape where numerous individuals express interest in running for office during general elections. Ehanire-Danjuma (2005) attributes the low representation of women in political and decision-making spheres to the failure to recognize that integrating gender perspectives into democracy fosters inclusivity in the democratic process (Ojo, 2013). Nigeria's representation of women in political and decision-making roles falls significantly below the global standard of 35% affirmative action, leading to the marginalization of women in public affairs and the neglect of their interests in governance. (Ngara, 2013). According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union Report of 2007, only twelve countries have achieved the critical threshold of 30% women representation in parliament. Among these countries, Rwanda, Sweden,

Finland, and Argentina stand out, with more than 40% of women elected to their legislative bodies (IPU, 2019).

The participation and contributions of Nigerian women to the political development of the country can be traced back to the pre-colonial era. Their societal roles were culturally determined, primarily associated with their status as wives and mothers. Despite being assigned inferior roles, women managed to make significant political contributions by actively engaging individually and collectively, thereby greatly contributing to the progress of society. For instance, Bakwa Turunku of Zaria, who possessed political acumen and agricultural holdings, became the first woman Saraunya of Zaria. Another notable figure was Queen Amina of Zazzau, who attained the throne through popular consent in 1576 and displayed traditionally male-associated skills (Odah, 2003).

However, the achievements of women in ancient pre-colonial Nigeria were disrupted with the advent of colonialism (Oni, 2014). This period witnessed gender oppression, exploitation, and the enforcement of cultural and traditional practices, marital sanctions, and religious doctrines that disempowered women from participating in public decision-making as above. In this context, the objective of this paper is to examine the challenges and dynamics surrounding women's political engagement in Nigeria. The primary significance of this research lies in exploring the reasons behind the low level of political participation among women in Nigerian politics and identifying the barriers that prevent their active engagement. The democratic process in Nigeria since the inception of the Fourth Republic will be specifically analyzed. The paper is structured into eight sections: the introduction presents a summary of women's limited involvement in politics, while the second began with the methodology of the study. The third section clarifies the conceptual discourse of politics, democracy, and political participation. The fourth section provides the theoretical framework supporting this study, followed by the fifth section offers an overview of women's political participation in Nigeria. The sixth section examines the factors that hinder their political engagement. The seventh section explores the enhancement of women participation in politics in Nigeria: A Functional Approach. The final section presents specific recommendations and conclusions regarding the low level of women's political participation in Nigeria.

Methodology

In order to accomplish the objectives of this study, a qualitative approach was employed, utilizing secondary data sources and thematic analysis. The utilization of secondary data was deemed appropriate for this investigation, as it facilitated the collection of existing data that is relevant to the research topic. The data sources for this study encompassed peer-reviewed journal articles, books, reports, and other pertinent documents obtained from academic databases such as Scopus, JSTOR, Google Scholar and SPSS.

Thematic analysis served as the primary data analysis technique employed in this research. This method enabled the identification and examination of patterns, themes, and concepts within the

data that are relevant to the research question. The analysis process commenced by immersing oneself in the data and identifying key concepts and themes.

A Conceptual Discourse

Politics

The concept of politics has been viewed in diverse perspectives by scholars who have written on the subject matter. Some scholars noted that esteemed authorities cannot agree on what the subject matter is all about. Consequently, the term politics has been defined in diverse ways. As a result, the term "politics" has been defined in numerous ways. Harold Lasswell, for instance, conceptualizes politics as "Who gets What, When and How?" (Lasswell, 1936), emphasizing the distribution of power and resources among individuals in authority or those capable of influencing decision-makers. Similarly, George Kousolas (1981, cited in Olu-Adeyemi 2013) narrows the focus of politics to the State and its institutions, defining it as "those activities that are closely related to the State and its structure of government" (Kousolas 1975:4, cited in Olu-Adeyemi, 2013). Conversely, David Easton views politics from the standpoint of resource and value allocation, defining it as "the authoritative allocation of values" (Easton, 1965:50, cited in Olu-Adeyemi, 2013). However, it's worth noting that these differing definitions and viewpoints on politics can be reconciled by synthesizing them to propose that politics is the conscious endeavor to influence the thoughts and resources of individuals and nations.

Democracy

In any particular culture, democracy is defined as a system of government with definite principles such as popular authority, political justice, public discussions, and periodic selections, all of which are attributes that enable excellent governance and development (Sambo, 1999). Democracy, according to Abraham Lincoln, is "government of the people, by the people, and for the people." In general, democracy entails the ability to engage in the political process in one's own country's decision-making. It rejects dictatorship and uncertainty. It honors the consent of the governed and safeguards human behaviour, values, and safety (Ake 1996). In any society, democracy requires the recognition of popular sovereignty, equal opportunity for all to participate in political processes, majority rule, individual representativeness, minority rights to full participation, right of choice between different platforms, public debate, agreement on major issues, and, most importantly, periodic elections (Oke, 2005). Democracy, according to Schumpeter, is a recognized organization for reaching a political choice in which individuals receive political authority to adopt through competitive conflicts for the votes of the people.

Political Participation

Sanghera, (2005) defines political participation as the active engagement by individuals and groups with the governmental processes that affect their lives. This encompasses both involvements in decision-making and acts of opposition. The essence of political participation in

any society, either civilised or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and dispensing power to organise society, harness and distribute resources and to influence decision making in line with organised or individual interests (Arowolo and Abe, 2008).

Women in the fourth republic of Nigeria

Nigeria stands as Africa's most populous nation. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in 2016, the population of Nigeria was estimated at 193 million, with women accounting for 49.2% and men for 50.8% of this populace. Fundamentally, women make up roughly half of Nigeria's population and have been pivotal not just within households but also in fostering political stability and socio-economic progress. Throughout history, women have actively contributed to advocating for human rights and advancing democratization efforts, both before and after colonial rule (Hamalai, 2014). Women form an integral part of Nigeria's population, contributing significantly not just within families but also to political stability and socio-economic development. Throughout history, women have played crucial roles in advocating for human rights and promoting democratization, both before and after colonial times. In pre-colonial Nigerian communities, women held prominence in social, economic, and political structures. However, colonialism marginalized women by excluding them from political processes and institutions. This changed with the Richard's Constitution of 1946, which established a House of Chiefs in Northern Nigeria and regional houses in other areas. In Southern Nigeria, three women such as; Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Margaret Ekpo, and Janet Mokelu were appointed to these houses. Despite their constitutional recognition, their powers were largely advisory rather than legislative. During Nigeria's First Republic (1963-1966), women's participation remained limited. Wuraola Esan became the first female member of the Federal Parliament in 1960, representing Ibadan West as a nominated Senator. Margaret Ekpo also secured a seat in the Eastern Regional House of Assembly in 1961, where she served until the collapse of the First Republic in 1966.

During the 2nd and particularly the 3rd Republic, there was noticeable advancement in women's participation in politics and decision-making processes. Some women held positions such as councillor, with Chief (Mrs.) Titilayo Ajanaku serving as Chairperson of the Abeokuta Local Government Council in Ogun State, and two female Deputy Governors, Alhaja Sinatu Ojikutu and Mrs. Cecilia Ekpenyong, in Lagos and Cross River State, respectively. Likewise, in 1992, Kofo Bucknor-Akerele secured a Senate seat, while Florence Ita-Giwa emerged victorious in the House of Representatives election (Oluyemi, 2016). It's important to highlight that prior to 1999, the proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament never exceeded 3.1%, and for the federal Executive council, it remained below 5%. These figures largely contributed to the marginalization of women in public affairs and the disregard for their interests in governance. (Luka, 2012)

However, in 1999, out of a total of 469 seats in the Senate and House of Representatives, only 15 were occupied by women, constituting 3.19% representation. This figure rose to 25 in 2003, representing 5.33%, further increasing to 34 in 2007, which accounted for 7.24%. In addition, there was a slight decline in 2011, with 33 seats occupied by women, representing 7.03%. During the period between 2003 and 2007, there were 4 to 6 women serving as deputy governors. Despite these increments, women's representation in Nigerian politics and the pursuit of democracy still fall considerably short of the global standard of 35% affirmative action. (Ngara & Ayabam, 2013:48).

In Nigeria's current Fourth Republic, there is clear evidence of active participation by Nigerian women in politics. One prominent figure is Sarah Jibril, who made history by being the first woman to contest a presidential primary election in Nigeria. Despite multiple attempts in both primary and general elections, she did not secure victory. Jibril advocates for a transparent and credible government. Despite the challenges they've faced, Nigerian women have shown unwavering determination and are increasingly at the forefront. However, Aisha Alhassan, also known as Mama Taraba challenged the status quo by running for governor of Taraba State, symbolizing progress in gender equality and women's political empowerment, challenging traditional attitudes. Similarly, Obiageli Ezekwesili presidential bid highlights the growing diversity and inclusivity in the political landscape. Their involvement in arenas traditionally dominated by specific demographics signifies significant strides towards a more representative and inclusive governance structure. Additionally, Ezekwesili co-founded Transparency International and the #BringBackOurGirlsMovement, advocating for the release of the Chibok girls kidnapped by Boko Haram. In 2020, Aisha Yusufu played a prominent role in the movement against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), demonstrating remarkable courage, even in life-threatening situations during protests. Their endeavors serve as sources of inspiration for others encountering similar obstacles, fostering increased involvement and representation across various segments of society. Although they may not have emerged victorious in their respective elections, their bravery and persistence contribute significantly to the overarching narrative of progress and transformation in politics.

Dr. Okonjo Iweala, who served as Managing Director of the World Bank from 2007 to 2011 and held the position of Minister of Finance under former presidents Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. During her tenure as minister, Dr. Iweala played a key role in driving Nigeria's economy to become the largest on the African continent. She spearheaded empowerment initiatives that generated employment opportunities for both youths and women, while also advocating for a corruption-free financial system in Nigeria. Dr. Iweala's impact transcends national boundaries, with significant contributions not only to Nigeria's political economy but also on the global stage, marking a substantial increase in international recognition (Erunke & Shuaibu, 2013:6).

Similarly, Professor Dora Akunyili, who led the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), made a remarkable impression. Under her leadership, there was a notable reduction in the influx of counterfeit drugs from various sources into the Nigerian market. Professor Akunyili's influence extended beyond combating counterfeit drugs to encompass the regulation of various consumables, including food items, body lotions, creams, soaps, water, and assorted beverages. Products entering Nigeria through different borders underwent rigorous scrutiny to ensure their safety before being permitted entry at the seaports. However, it's important to acknowledge that despite these efforts, the system occasionally encountered challenges (Erunke & Shuaibu, 2013:6).

Since the inception of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999, men have predominantly held sway in the country's political landscape, despite numerous initiatives by governmental and non-governmental entities to bolster women's participation and representation in elective politics, notably within the National Assembly. These endeavors encompass the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the establishment of the National Commission for Women in 1989, later transformed into the Ministry of Women Affairs in 1995. In 2006, Nigeria formulated a National Gender Policy, which advocates for a 35% affirmative action for women in both appointed and elected positions. Additional initiatives include the creation of the Women Political Empowerment Office and Nigeria Women Trust Fund in 2011, as well as the establishment of the 100 Women Lobby Group. Furthermore, efforts have been made to develop a gender policy for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), organize the National Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue, and convene the Nigeria Women Strategy Conference (Oluyemi, 2016: 10).

Theoretical Framework

This research work employs the theoretical framework of feminism. With its roots tracing back to the intellectual contributions of early liberal feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill in the 18th century, feminist theory constitutes a comprehensive assemblage of intellectual frameworks and perspectives that endeavor to comprehend and scrutinize the multifarious social, political, and economic disparities and oppressions encountered by women and individuals who identify with marginalized gender categories (Cudd, 2022). Its genesis can be traced back to the latter part of the 19th century and the early 20th century, arising as a retort to gender-based discrimination and the arduous struggle for women's rights (Ferguson, 2017).

The crux of feminist theory lies in its acknowledgment of the historical and contemporary social structures that have routinely placed women at a disadvantage, engendering and perpetuating gender inequities (Gross, 2013). Its fundamental objective resides in the critical evaluation and eventual transformation of these structures through the meticulous examination of power dynamics, gender roles, and societal norms. Feminist theorists delve into the intricate intersections between

gender and other systems of oppression, such as race, class, sexuality, and ability, elucidating their collective influence on individual experiences and the establishment of social hierarchies (Ferguson, 2017).

Feminist theory operates on a series of fundamental assumptions that serve as the bedrock for its analysis and critique of gender-based inequalities. While specific feminist theories may place varying degrees of emphasis on particular aspects, the following assumptions generally underpin the feminist framework:

Gender as a social construct: Feminist theory acknowledges that gender is not an inherent or biologically determined trait, but rather a social construct that shapes societal expectations, roles, and behaviors associated with female/femininity and male/masculinity. It asserts that these socially constructed gender norms are acquired through socialization processes and are subject to modification.

Patriarchy as a power system: Feminist theory contends that patriarchal structures, which prioritize and grant privileges to men's interests and authority, underlie various forms of gender-based oppression. Patriarchy is understood as a system that permeates social, political, and economic institutions, reinforcing male dominance and perpetuating gender inequalities.

Intersectionality: Feminist theory recognizes the intersectional nature of gender by acknowledging that it intertwines with other systems of oppression, such as race, class, sexuality, and ability. Intersectionality highlights that individuals' experiences of privilege or marginalization are shaped by the combination of multiple social identities and the interplay of diverse forms of oppression. It emphasizes the necessity of considering the interconnectedness of these systems when analyzing gender inequality.

The personal as political: Feminist theory posits those individual experiences of gender-based discrimination and oppression are interconnected with broader social and political structures. It acknowledges that personal experiences are not isolated incidents, but rather reflections of systemic inequalities and power dynamics. Consequently, personal struggles and individual choices are perceived as political acts that can challenge or reinforce existing power structures.

Centrality of women's experiences and voices: Feminist theory places a central focus on women's experiences, perspectives, and voices that have historically been marginalized or silenced. It seeks to highlight and validate women's lived realities, contesting dominant male-centric narratives and knowledge production. This emphasis on women's experiences aims to reveal and challenge the ways in which women have been excluded or misrepresented in various spheres of life.

Activism and social change: Feminist theory is not confined to intellectual inquiry alone but is intrinsically linked to activism and the pursuit of social change. It endeavors to identify and challenge oppressive practices while advocating for gender equality. Feminist theory

acknowledges the significance of individual and collective action in effecting meaningful social transformation and strives to create inclusive and equitable societies (Gross, 2013).

These assumptions form the basis for a comprehensive understanding of the systemic nature of gender inequality, and they inform the design and implementation of interventions and policies that aim to challenge and dismantle oppressive structures while promoting equitable and inclusive societies. The theory, however, has faced criticism for being perceived as overly descriptive rather than prescriptive, lacking a comprehensive plan to address the issues raised (Rosenfelt & Newton, 2013). Integrating feminist theory into the practice of social work poses challenges, as it is often discussed in relation to ethical considerations and the prevailing male-dominated culture resulting from systemic oppression and power imbalances.

An Overview of Women Political Participation in Nigeria

The issue of women's representation in politics and their quest for democratic participation has been a subject of contention in Nigeria since its independence. The first republic witnessed the presence of only four female lawmakers, an insufficient number that failed to provide women with the necessary political influence they deserved. Consequently, women were unable to actively engage in the decision-making process during that period. The era of military rule, which commenced in 1966, further hindered women's political participation, resulting in their marginalized voices in politics and decision-making processes (Samuel & Segun, 2012).

As a response, women have sought to influence the power dynamics in alignment with their stated interests as a primary motivation for political engagement. Arowolo and Aluko (2010) assert that women, in a deliberate and gradual manner, have sought to rebalance the equation of power, redistribute resources, and advocate for their own interests in recent times. In Nigerian politics, women's presence is primarily observed at the level of campaign mobilization, voting, and covert support, while their participation in actual political decision-making remains limited, as observed in preliminary assessments. Diverse perspectives exist regarding the extent to which women's roles are confined to the domestic sphere or if they can engage in other economic and political activities alongside their male counterparts.

Democracy is widely acknowledged as the optimal form of social organization, predicated on the active involvement of citizens in the selection and election of their leaders and representatives within a democratic state. It serves as a framework for effective governance and ensures the fundamental human rights of law-abiding individuals. Following a protracted period of authoritarian military rule, Nigeria's transition to democracy on May 29, 1999, was propelled by the allure of these desirable attributes and the global demand for democratic governance. The restoration of democracy was met with a sense of relief among Nigerians, as they were finally liberated from the shackles of unilateralism and the unpredictability associated with military rule.

It is worth noting that prior to 1999, the representation of women in national parliament and the federal Executive Council never surpassed 3.1% and 5%, respectively (Luka, 2012).

Table 1: Distribution of Number Occupying Elective Position as President and Vice President in the Executive Arm and Number of Available Seat (1999 – 2015)

Position	1999-2003		2003-2007		2007-2011		2011-2015		2015 - 2019		2019 -	
	No. of Seat Available	% F	No. of Seat Available	% F	No. of Seat Available	% F	No. of Seat Available	% F	No. of Seat Available	% F	No. of Seat Available	% F
President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Vice President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0

Source: Office of Secretary to the Government of Federation (OSGF)

Males have dominated politics in Nigeria since the country's independence. Women had been underrepresented in all three branches of government. Men are increasingly playing the most important roles in politics, especially at the federal level, where the president, vice presidents, and secretary to the government of the federation, as well as appointive ministerial positions, are all held by men. The table below depicts the current status quo in terms of gender representation in positions of president and vice president, with all posts held by men.

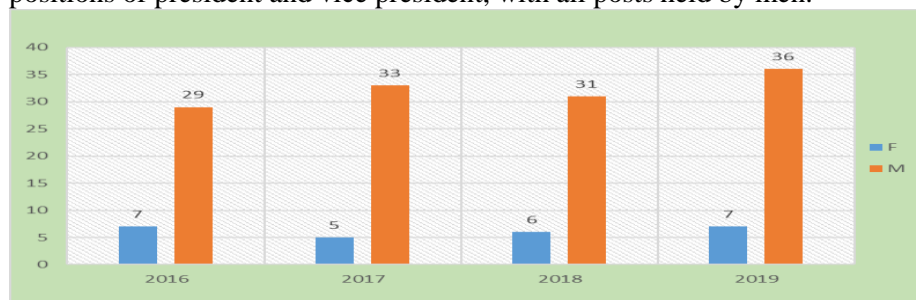


Figure 1: Appointive Ministerial Political Position by Sex (2016 – 2019)

The data presented focuses solely on ministerial appointments at the federal level. From 2016 to 2019, the number of males and females appointed as ministers is shown in the graph above. Only 7 females were appointed in 2016, while only 5 females were appointed in 2017. In 2018 and 2019, there were 6 and 7 female ministers appointed, respectively.

Table 2: Distribution of Secretaries to the Government of the Federation from 1999 – 2019

Sex	1999	2007	2008	2011	2015	2019
Male	1	1	1	1	1	1
Female	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Office of Secretary to the Government of Federation (OSGF)

From the table above, women have never been appointed as secretary to the government of the federation since independence in Nigeria.

Table 3: Representation in the National Parliament by Year and Sex

Legislator	1999-2003		2003-2007		2007-2011		2011-2015		2015-2019		2019-	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
SENATE												
Male	106	97.2	106	97.2	100	91.7	102	93.6	101	92.7	102	93.6
Female	3	2.8	3	2.8	9	8.3	7	6.4	8	7.3	7	6.4
Total	109	100	109	100	109	100	109	100	109	100	109	100
HOUSE OF REPS.												
Male	348	96.7	339	94.2	335	93.1	336	93.3	337	93.6	338	93.9
Female	12	3.3	21	5.8	25	6.9	24	6.7	23	6.4	22	6.1
Total	360	100	360	100	360	100	360	100	360	100	360	100
BOTH HOUSES												
Male	454	96.8	445	94.9	435	92.8	438	93.4	438	93.4	440	93.8
Female	15	3.2	24	5.1	34	7.2	31	6.6	31	6.6	29	6.2
Total	469	100	469	100	469	100	469	100	469	100	469	100

Source: National Assembly, Abuja

Nigeria's female population is estimated to make up over half of the country's total population. Representation at the National Parliament is measured as the proportion of seats held by men and women in the lower and upper-houses of the National Assembly. From the table above, women have been underrepresented in the National Parliament since the resumption of democracy in 1999 until the most recent election in 2019. 2007-2011 had the largest participation of 7.2 percent, followed by 6.6 percent in 2011-2015 and 2015-2019. The current Women representation in National Parliament (2019) is 6.2 per cent.

Table 4: Number Occupying Principal Positions at the National Assembly by type of Office, Sex and Year (SENATE)

Type Of Office	2016		2017		2018		2019	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Senate President		1		1		1		1
Dep. Senate President		1		1		1		1
Senate Majority Leader		1		1		1		1
Dep.Senate Majority Leader		1		1		1		1
Minority Senate Leader		1		1	1		1	
Dep. Minority Senate Leader		1		1		1		1

Chief Whip		1		1		1		1
Dep. Chief Whip		1		1		1		1
Minority Whip		1		1		1		1
Dep. Minority Whip		1		1		1		1
Committee Chairpersons	6	63	6	63	6	63	6	63
Total	6	73	6	73	7	72	7	72

Source: National Assembly (NASS)

Males dominated the Senate's top positions, as shown in Table **. In 2016, six women and 73 males occupied key positions in the Senate, and the numbers remained the same in 2017. The number of women and men serving as principal officials has the same figures of 7 women and 72 men in both 2018 and 2019. For each year from 2016 to 2019, just six women served as committee chairpersons. In both 2018 and 2019, a woman each served as the Minority Senate Leader in the Senate.

Table 5: Number Occupying Principal Positions at The National Assembly by Type of Office, Sex and Year (House Of Representative)

TYPE OF OFFICE	2016		2017		2018		2019	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Speaker		1		1		1		1
Dep.Speaker		1		1		1		1
House Majority Leader		1		1		1		1
Dep.House Majority Leader		1		1		1		1
House Minority Leader		1		1		1		1
Dep. House Minority Leader		1		1		1		1
House Chief Whip		1		1		1		1
Dep. House Chief Whip		1		1		1		1
House Minority Whip		1		1		1		1
Dep. House Minority Whip	1		1		1		1	
Committee Chairpersons	8	88	8	88	8	88	8	88
Total	9	97	9	97	9	97	9	97

Source: National Assembly (NASS)

From the Table above, men also dominate the House of Representative in Nigeria, with only 9 women among the 106 principal officers in each year (2016 - 2019). Only 8 women were among the 97 Committee Chairpersons over the years, and a woman held the role of Deputy House Minority Whip (2016 - 2019).

Table 6: Number of National Judicial Officers by Position, Sex and Year

Position	2016		2017		2018	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Chief Justice of Nigeria	0	1	0	1	0	1
Justice of Supreme Court	3	10	4	10	4	12
President of Court of Appeal	1	0	1	0	1	0
Justices of Court of Appeal	25	53	24	51	27	60
President of National Industrial Court	0	1	0	1	0	1
Judges of National Industrial Court	8	10	13	25	13	21
Chief Judges of High Courts	11	28	11	28	11	28
Judges of High Courts	228	486	200	421	230	581
Chief Registrar of Supreme Court	0	1	0	1	0	1
Total	276	590	253	538	286	705

Source: National Judicial Council

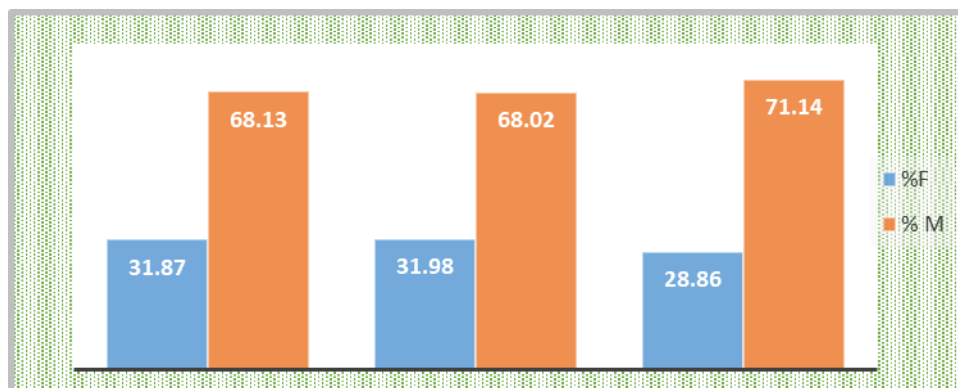


Figure 6a: Percentage Representation of Female National Judicial Officers by Year and Sex

In Nigeria, female members of the National Judicial Officers accounted for 31.87 percent in 2016 and 31.98 percent in 2017, respectively, while 28.86 percent in 2018. From 2016 to 2018, no females served as Chief Justice of Nigeria, President of the National Industrial Court, or Chief Registrar of the Supreme Court, as stated in the Table above. During the same time period, a woman served as the President of the Court of Appeal.

Factors Hindering Women's Political Participation in Nigerian Politics

The extent of women's participation and their access to formal political power structures vary across different countries (Bari, 2005). In the Nigerian context, several challenges have been identified as hindrances to women's engagement in the country's social, economic, and political spheres. Some of these factors can be attributed to the inherent status of women, while others are deliberately created by male counterparts to restrict women to passive roles. The key factors include the following:

i. Religious and Cultural Belief System

In Nigeria, similar to numerous other African nations, cultural norms and religious beliefs often prohibit women from actively participating in politics. The traditional roles assigned to women as child bearers and caretakers within the patriarchal lineage contribute significantly to the marginalization of women in the realm of active politics. Politics is widely perceived as a morally compromised arena in this region, with the potential to inflict harm upon individuals with spiritual inclinations who possess an awareness of the afterlife. Furthermore, the political landscape in developing countries encompasses various clandestine practices, including vote buying, electoral fraud, physical attacks, political assassinations, and acts of violence. These enigmatic aspects further contribute to the complexities surrounding political engagement in these contexts.

ii. Financial Constraints and High Election Costs

In Nigerian politics, the influence of financial resources is pervasive. The role of "money" assumes a critical significance in the establishment, organization, and electoral processes across various levels of political offices, including the presidential, governorship, senatorial, local council, and age grade elections. Money exerts a profound impact on the formation, creation, and dismantling of both private and governmental positions, which are often driven by pecuniary interests.

Consequently, in Nigeria, individuals with greater financial power are more likely to secure public offices. Tor and Terkula (2011) argue that the corrupt nature of the Nigerian system systematically disadvantages women, leaving them at a disadvantage compared to men. Women, as a generalized group, often lack the necessary economic support and are inherently characterized by traits such as empathy, kindness, and a primary focus on domestic matters, making their pursuit of public positions for personal gain exceptionally rare.

Conversely, men who possess limited understanding of the plight faced by the masses may exploit public funds to amass personal wealth and build their political empires. This pattern is exemplified by the numerous corruption scandals involving high-ranking officials and politicians that have recently plagued Nigeria. Although both men and women are affected by these corrupt practices, women bear a disproportionate burden. Women face significant financial hurdles when it comes to supporting political parties and campaigns, as even the most modest gubernatorial election can cost up to 200 million naira. The ability of women to amass such substantial sums of money is limited, and their influence over party finances and development is often constrained. Consequently, the likelihood of a woman being nominated for such a position within a political party remains low (Nda, 2003).

iii. Lack of Effective means of implementation of Affirmative Action

According to Agbalajobi (2010), affirmative action is usually a sum set aside to supplement non-discrimination. It's a broad term that refers to a variety of measures aimed at assisting vulnerable groups in society, particularly women. They include policies that utilize deliberate action to

combat discrimination. He affirmed that, a policy process of this type allows for laws with the goal of enhancing equal opportunity for individuals and developments in the status of excluded groups.

iv. Women's Perception of Politics

The prevailing perception in Nigeria characterizes politics as a dishonorable occupation, associated with individuals who lack principles, engage in unscrupulous practices, and disregard proper procedures. This negative perception influences public opinion, particularly regarding female politicians, who are often viewed as mere pawns manipulated by cunning male politicians. Women's active involvement in political campaigns and pursuit of public office is often deemed excessive and deviant, reinforcing traditional gender roles that confine women to subordinate positions.

v. The Demands of Politics

Political participation in Nigeria demands significant time and attention, involving various activities such as group meetings, primaries, and campaign events. The demanding nature of political engagement often necessitates sacrifices, especially for women. The challenges faced by female politicians extend beyond the political sphere and impact their personal lives, including their marital relationships. These sacrifices may include compromises in marriage and family life, leading to divorce or marital strain.

vi. The Issue of Indigeneity

In the realm of Nigerian politics, the issue of marriage and constituency affiliation poses a significant barrier to active women's participation. Women who marry individuals from constituencies outside their birthplace, but aspire to run for office in their marital constituencies, often face hurdles due to their perceived non-indigene status. The situation is further exacerbated when the woman's spouse belongs to a different ethnic group. These circumstances create an environment where ambitious women are subject to discouragement and potential barriers that impede their political aspirations.

vii. Poverty.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA, 2009) aptly asserts that "Poverty wears a woman's face in Africa," underscoring the unequal burden of poverty borne by women in the region. Nigerian women, in particular, face multifaceted challenges stemming from economic constraints. They confront restricted access to vital resources such as education, financial capital, credit information, skill development opportunities, and healthcare, all of which impede their journey towards economic empowerment. Moreover, the additional responsibilities of childbearing and household management further compound these obstacles, limiting their engagement in social and political spheres. Furthermore, certain traditional practices prevalent in Nigeria deny women their rightful property and inheritance rights, exacerbating their economic vulnerability. Alarming reports reveal that African women possess less than 1% of the continent's total assets, while their lack of insurance coverage significantly hampers their access to loans.

viii. Patriarchal Nature of the Nigerian Society.

Over the past two decades, scholars have redefined the concept of "patriarchy" to explore its origins and manifestations in the context of men's dominance over women (Kamarae, 1992). Within Nigerian society, the patriarchal framework strongly favors male political participation, particularly in African societies. This preference for male representation not only discourages but also prevents women from actively engaging in politics. Patriarchal culture establishes societal boundaries that perpetuate women's unequal position in family and market spheres by disregarding gender-differential language in legal rights, condoning domestic and sexual violence, and endorsing differential compensation for comparable work. Tradition, culture, and religion have historically reinforced male domination within social institutions and hierarchical leadership structures, contributing to women's marginalization across various domains, including education, the economy, the job market, politics, business, family, and inheritance (Salaam, 2003).

Enhancing Women Participation in Politics in Nigeria: A Functional Approach

Considering the information derived through the analysis of data employed during the course of this study, the following recommendations are hereby suggested as policies to support the participation of women in politics which arguably will boost development.

- All levels of government, including the federal, state, and municipal levels, should encourage gender mainstreaming. However, Gender Mainstreaming helps to incorporate the perspective of gender equality across all government action. In order to promote gender equality, governments can use this technique to assist them make better decisions concerning legislation, policies, and programs across all sectors and levels. A commitment to gender mainstreaming is one of the most effective ways that governments can support and promote gender equality.
- A crucial component of women's effectiveness in political processes is the inclusion of leadership training. However, in order to develop the potential of women to assume leadership roles in political, economic, and societal sectors and ensure that women are fully involved, it is necessary to educate and train them.
- The Federal Republic of Nigeria's constitution should also make it a requirement that 35% of political appointments at all levels of government be reserved exclusively for women. The Role of Women towards Political Participation in Nigeria should therefore quickly domesticate CEDAW and incorporate it into local laws. This will eliminate the inconsistent and discriminatory elements found in Nigerian statutory, customary, and religious laws, such as the Sharia law, which uphold male supremacy and the patriarchal system. The domestication of CEDAW will also forbid the main forces of socialization from fostering the patriarchal system and men's dominance.

- There should be the full implementation of the 35% Affirmative Action as proposed by CEDAW which would enhance greatly women political participation in Nigeria. Nigeria is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and as such, by constitutional provision, 35% of the seats in the National Assembly, States' Houses of Assembly, and Local Government Councils in Nigeria should be reserved for women. This quota system should be fully implemented.
- More initiatives promoting women's empowerment should be created at all levels, from local to national. On the other hand, programs for women's empowerment ought to be more than simply words; they ought to be actualized laws. This is because the most important factor in the growth of society is the empowerment of women and children. Women should be given the same opportunities in politics and political activity as men, which means they should have the same rights to representation, representation themselves, and participation in politics.
- To make gender equality a necessity, intense efforts should be made to promote voter consciousness, educate, and train women in order to make gender equality a must additionally, women's education needs to reach adults in both urban and rural settings. In society, female education should be emphasized since an educated woman is an intelligent woman, and an informed woman has less fear. Education for women can help them overcome feelings of inferiority and give them the strength and self-assurance they need to compete with men.
- Women already in politics should serve as mentors and also design a form of agenda to help support women candidate in their career development. Potential role models and one's network of support: by identifying potential candidates, pairing them with experienced female politicians, serving as a mentor, and giving young or aspiring female politicians training to help them expand their capacities.
- The significance of joint action by both sexes in eliminating societal stereotypes should be emphasized. In order to change the notion in society that women are less valuable than males, the government should work in collaboration with women's movements and civil society to launch an aggressive awareness and enlightenment campaign.
- Also, the abandonment of old eras that subscribe to the narrow roles of women in Nigerian society, such as the kitchen and home; and the transition to a new and more modern platform for women, in which women take on roles as world changers, state builders, and so on, assisting the male folk at the top.

Conclusion

Women's political participation in Nigeria is a major problem. For years, women have been marginalized in politics, resulting in a growing awareness of their under-representation in public

life. Women, on the other hand, experience a lot of resistance when it comes to participation in politics from the perspective of culture and tradition. Despite global campaign for gender equality, women's political representation in the country has failed to achieve the critical mass of 30% women's representation in the country's parliament. Which are coupled with the socioeconomic factors, political structures, historical heritages, societal norms and beliefs have created a culture that alienates women from the mainstream of Nigerian politics. The development of any nation, state or country would be more effective if women who constitute half of the national population should be actively involved in politics as well as their male counterparts. If fully implemented, the aforementioned recommendations will undoubtedly improve the political status of women in Nigeria, providing them an advantage over their male counterparts in the twenty-first century and beyond.

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