Women and Political Participation in Nigeria: A Critical Assessment and The Way Forward

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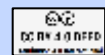*Correspondence author: salauja@lasued.edu.ng

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	In line with the National Centre for Women Development, Nigerian women constituted nearly half of the population of the country (49.31%). Nigeria had recorded low participation of women in politics, both in elective and appointive positions. In the history of Africa, particularly in Nigerian political trends, it was obvious that the major roles performed by women in the society were domestic and supernatural affairs. The underrepresentation of women in political participation in Nigeria has gained prominence from the pre-colonial era till date. Recently, according to "The National Centre for Women Development" on women's participation in Nigerian politics, women's involvement in active politics started gaining prominence in the Fourth Republic. Over two decades, Nigeria had enjoyed uninterrupted democratic governance, which involved 6.7% of women participating in politics, which was below the global average of 22.5%. In the immediate past administration of President Muhammad Buhari, only seven (7) out of forty-three (43) ministers in his executive cabinet were women representing 16.7%. In the ninth National Assembly, women have nineteen seats out of 469 members representing 10.9% in the National Assembly (2019-2023). This paper was designed to critically assess the rate of women in political participation in Nigeria. The researcher recommended that women should be encouraged to be actively involved in political participation in their various societies by the people of their constituency. Federal Government through the National Assembly should continue to review the electoral act to give waivers to women's candidacies by encouraging them to show more interest in politics through advocacy on gender equality.

1. Introduction

Participation in politics is a very important factor in the democratic progress of any society. It is a fundamental prerequisite of democratic quality. Ideally, democracy aims to preserve the dignity and fundamental rights of the individual, achieve social justice, foster economic and social development of the community, strengthen the cohesion of

the society, and enhance national tranquility (Inter-parliamentary Union 1997). Under international human law, both men and women should have equal rights and be entitled to everything generally in society. Consequently, when women participate in decision-making within the political entity, the government is more effectively held accountable whereby rights and demands are better represented within the policy process.

Though, women comprise more than half of the world's total population and contribute to societal development (Daniel and Faith 2013). But, in our view, The status of women in Nigeria is much lower than men in every sector of the economy and political offices. Democracies around the world make special provisions to promote women's participation. Despite the societal role of women in society, women's impact is yet to be recognized. This is a result of cultural, religious, and traditional practices and some personal factors that are very different from society's context across the world. Participation of women in politics could be an important vehicle for driving change in the country's political landscape. Nigeria's 1999 constitution made provision for affirmative action concerning ensuring that the composition of the government is consistent with the principle of Federal character. Unfortunately, the affirmative action advocated by the Constitution falls short of guaranteeing or ensuring equal representation in government based on gender.

Presently, the spate of women's participation and representation is still very low compared to their male counterparts, and this challenges the inclusiveness requirements for the achievement of development in electoral democracy (Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2012). The observable situation in Nigeria's party democracy is just achieved very little progress has been made in women's political representation, while some other African Countries are making giant strides. Whichever is the reason, the fact remains that there is a renewed culture of violence in our elections and not much attention has been given to the impact of the raging and indeed increasing spate of insecurity during elections on the drop in records of women's political attainment in Nigeria.

2. Statement of the Problem

Over the years, there have been numerous efforts and programs to enhance women's participation in local politics, especially in the developing world. Nigeria has not been an exception owing to the numerous advocacy and capacity-building activities that have been tailored towards improving female participation. The international conference on women in Beijing in 1995 enhanced the effective participation of women in politics in Nigeria (Ilasomo, 2012). But we need to first know the true condition of women in local areas or at the sub-national levels before any meaningful international politics can be made. Most women in Africa still live and work in a condition under which they are treated as mere instruments of production and social reproduction. This may not be the entire predicament facing women. Recently these seem to be global efforts toward addressing gender-related issues with particular references to women's empowerment. These efforts were targeted to end discrimination against women and ensure that women are empowered to compete favorably in all facets of nation-building. These concerns led to the United Nations coming to the limelight after the UN World Women's Conference in Beijing, China in 1995 (Aina, 2012). Even before these equity and equality contestations, feminists and advocates have always campaigned for gender equity as a means to end gender discrimination. However, much has not been achieved especially in politics. The continued exclusion of women from decision-making positions will slow down the pace of development of the democratic process and stunt

the economic growth of the nation. Because men govern most political institutions which they use to further their interests that will not promote women or women's interests. When policy decisions and laws are being made for society, the extent to which the government determines the degree to which its decision will be appropriated and meet the needs of the entire nation's proper representation of women and the inclusion of their perspective into the decision-making process will inevitably lead to solutions that are viable and satisfy a broader section of the society.

3. The Concept of Political Participation

Political participation could be referred to as the process or feelings of voluntary involvement of the people in the political affairs or activities of their country. It also involves people of a particular society taking an active or political part in choosing their leaders and also in decision-making in the government of their country. In political participation, citizens have many different ways of expressing their opinions about the world and also how their country is governed. Political participation is fully observed in a full-time democratic society, where people have total political and constitutional rights to partake in the politics and decision-making of their country.

4. Forms of Political Participation

Citizens participate in politics in the following ways;

- **Belonging to Political Parties**

In this case, people who are active and also interested in politics come together to form political parties. Members of these political parties take an active part and participate in electioneering campaigns, political rallies, and other forms of political meetings.

- **Contesting Elections**

A form of political participation also has to do with contesting in elections. Active political participants stand as candidates seeking elective public offices on the platform of political parties.

- **Voting**

In any democratic society, voting is the single most important form of political participation that a person takes part in. Because it ensures that politicians are elected by the people as representatives in government.

- **Protest**

Whether or not, it is a constitutional right, as it is in other democratic countries like the United States of America (USA), public protests are another important form of political participation. Because of this development, you are making your opinions known to society and the government in position in a very obvious way, with the hope that your actions will influence or initiate change in a particular area of politics.

- **Public Consultations**

In this case, public consultation, which is more commonly known as "Town Hall Meetings" offers ordinary citizens the chance to get together in a group with politicians or elected officials to make their opinions and feelings known.

- **Sponsoring of Political Parties**

Sponsoring political parties financially and materially is another way of political participation. In a democratic society, some wealthy citizens sponsor political parties vis-a-vis candidates as their way of political participation.

- **Holding of Public Office**

Holding public offices either elective or non-elective is another form of political participation, which allows the holder to contribute to the decision-making of the state.

5. Political Participation in Nigeria

Political participation is the involvement of the citizens in the political system. Eakin cited in Adelekan (2010), described political participation as the process through which the individual plays a role in the political life of his society and has the opportunity to take part in deciding what common goals of the society are and the best way of achieving these goals. According to Common Wealth (2017), political participation is an aspect of political behavior and it focuses on how individuals take part in politics. It is a voluntary activity and one may participate directly or indirectly. The various ways by which people can be involved in the political system include the selection or election of political leaders, formulation of policies, community activities, and other civic engagements.

According to Arowolo and Aluko (2010) the essence of political participation in any society, either civilized or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power, and influence decisions political participation is a means of contributing one's quota to the political system and overall development of the nation. Political participation is one of the fundamental requirements of democratic governance. This is the reason why Adelekan (2010) emphasized that ideally, democracy means individual participation in the decision that involves one's life. In a democratic system, there is a necessity for the citizenry to be fully involved in the democratic procedures of the choice of rulers and effective communication of public policies and attitudes. Any claim to the democratic regime or state must essentially embrace a high degree of completive choice, openness, and enjoyment of civic and that involves all groups of the society. The extent to which people participate In the political system differs from person to person.

Some of the factors that determine political participation are; the cultural, economic, political, religious, and educational background of individuals. Also, the level of political awareness as well as the measure of confidence in the political process determines the extent to which the citizens participate in the political system. In Nigeria, politics is influenced by money, ethnic and religious factors. Since independence in 1960, religious and ethnic politics have characterized the electioneering process in Nigeria. For instance, during the post-presidential election violence in the Muslim-dominated northern part of Nigeria, southerners and Christians were killed and attacked while many churches were burnt. Falade, (2007) expressed that policies in Nigeria are regarded as a dirty game and it is practiced with bitterness, hatred, rancor, and other associated evils. The outcome of this is that Nigeria is in various cycles of political crises and instability.

6. Factors Affecting Political Participation in Nigeria

Adeoti and Olaniyan (2014:5-6) claim that the root of the decadence in democratization dates back to the colonial period. The nationalists, either in Nigeria or elsewhere in Africa made one fundamental error in their struggle to decolonize and democratize their respective countries. They did not allow mass participation in the political emancipation of their countries. For Joseph (2014), one of the constant problems afflicting public participation in political processes in Nigeria is that of cultural systems denoting group foundries in class and ethnicity more often than not. In our view, Nigerians usually base their participation on class and ethnic politics by involving

themselves in honest and objective participation which has also led to many becoming disinterested in political participation.

Consequently, the incidence of poverty is hurting the socio-economic development of most families and communities. Hence the lack of interest by the citizens in political participation as they have to battle with extreme poverty they face on a day-to-day basis, leaving no room or interest in participation the high intensity of poverty in Nigeria is a great challenge for participation. There is widespread poverty in Nigeria despite its great endowments this is despite the efforts of successive regimes in Nigeria to introduce different programs to alleviate poverty. Nigeria has not been known to lack in such efforts, yet she is still ranked among the world's 25 poorest nations (Aderibigbe 2015).

According to Falade (2015), the Nigerian political system and acts of governance as presently constituted do not encourage the mass participation of people. It is discretely skewed to be continuously male-dominated and elite-driven. There is a lack of confidence in their political leaders by the citizens leading to mutual suspicion between the government and the citizens. This ugly scenario has implications for popular participation and governance. Statutory speaking, Nigeria has consistently ranked low in the world governance index in areas such as government effectiveness, political instability, and the presence of violence and terrorism. All Africa (2013) said 'it is so sad that Nigerians are only professing democracy but not possessing in the real sense genuine democracy.it is so glaring today that the society ea are in today is not democratic so many are happening which has indicated the glaring level of insecurity in the country.

Akindele et al. (2012) think that extra-budget spending by successive governments in Nigeria is a real threat to the political process in Nigeria. This is because the input of the electorate and the poor masses are not taken into consideration in the budget. Furthermore, there are enormous resources at the disposal of government that can be used to manipulate or even thwart the political process as a result of the people being left but by the budget. Akingbogun (2009) identified the inability of successive governments in the country to respond to the welfare and well-being of Nigerians as a challenge to the political process. Promises are only made not fulfilled. Alonge (2005) summed up the challenges of political participation in Nigeria's political process as ignorance and low level of education, public distrust, the role that money plays in political patronage, an executive-dominated system of governance, rising unemployment, and gender inequality.

Another challenge to political participation in Nigeria is the evil of thuggery and political hooliganism. This led to the loss of life and property through violence perpetrated through thuggery and hooliganism. This state of affairs has caused some citizens not to be supportive of the political process. There is a low level of political participation and disinterest in government in Nigeria. In essence, political processes are in place but the people are in place but the people are absent, thus a situation of democracy without the people is gradually becoming entrenched in the country.

7. Factors that Encourage Political Participation in Nigeria

According to Fung and Wright (2003), 'political participation helps to empower citizens. Ordinary citizens are involved in the process of decision-making. It helps to generate superior solutions as a result of wider deliberation and the existence of multiple strategies for solving problems. It provides an opportunity for ordinary citizens to have firsthand knowledge of governance and citizenship education. Strengthening

and empowering local government has been justified not only on the grounds of making local government more efficient but also on the grounds of increasing accountability and participation (Heller, 2001). The proposition of Wright (2003) and Heller (2001) forms the basis of the solution to the challenges of political participation in Nigeria.

Nigeria is a Nation-State with diverse ethnic groups, religions historical backgrounds, languages, and cultures (Jega, 2001). These are a line needed for national unity, cohesion, and integration. Therefore, one of the foremost means of fostering national integration is to have mass participation of the populace in government. This will improve the involvement of more citizens in the political process and strengthen democratic structures. According to Lowndes (2001) a tool that can encourage political Participation of women. Women constitute a significant segment of the country's population and play various roles. According to the World Bank (2011), women constitute 49.36 percent of Nigeria's population in essence, the more women participate, the greater the likelihood of curbing and promoting participation in the political process.

Elections in Africa, are usually a very volatile serious, and sensitive issue, so serious that politicians would go to any length to sway the results in their favor to the detriment of the electorate (Ighorojeh 2008). This compromises the political process. This undemocratic attitude often leads to political violence. One of the means through which rigging of the election and political violence could be reduced is for citizens to play an active role in governance and for the government to manage, without fear or favour free, fair, credible, and transparent elections. Agboola (2005) and Adegboye (2013) indicated that Nigeria should include respect and sanctity of the ballot boxes, the presence of transparent administration, robust civil societies, media, and diverse interest groups to encourage political participation. Also, the presence of an efficient guarantee of the welfare of most citizens is paramount. When more people take part in the political process, the leader is made to realize. The fact that is Accountable to the Electorate and the democratic structure. This will go a long way to bring about accountability in government. Transparency and accountability by the political elites will encourage political participation.

Participation itself constitutes a human right which must be respected by all democratic governments. (Ndiva 2008). In the same vein, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was released by the United Nations in 1948 also included civil and Political Rights as basic rights of the people. In essence, the people must have a say in who governs them. It is clear that Nigeria, being a Signatory member of the United Nations (UN) must abide by the convention of the world body to protect, preserve, and respect this right, thus making political participation relevant and cardinal issues to Nigeria as a country. The recognition of this basic human right by the government will not only serve the purpose of more citizens taking part in the political process but will also go a long way to improve the relationship between the government and the governed.

8. Comparative Analysis of Women and Political Participation in Africa
8.1. Rwanda

Rwanda has been a rallying point in his placement of women in governance. Over 60 percent of the seats in Rwanda's national parliament were held by women as of December 2022. The country had the highest and the strongest female participation in politics in Africa. It also ranked first globally, with the highest proportion of women in power in lower houses than in any other nation in the world. Our main focus is on the

comparative assessment and analysis of women in politics in Africa with three countries in contention.

8.2. South Africa

Gouws (2022) cited South Africa as a success story of women's representation in government with one of the highest numbers of women in parliament in the world at 46.3%, and a raft of progressive women-friendly laws that passed through parliament. More than half (51.1%) of the South African population are females. For instance, South African women made many incredible changes to get to where they are today. Before the year 1994 (the time democracy was first introduced in South Africa), the representation of women in parliament was 2.7% of the whole population of legislators, a rate that was so low compared to that of other countries like the United States of America. In the current government, the representation of women in the cabinet is more than 41%. And the number of women who have been either elected or nominated in parliament makes up over 48% of all the members of parliament in the country.

8.3. Kenya

The proportion of seats held by women in the National Parliament in Kenya had increased from 1.8 percent by the year 2003 and reached a peak in 2022 with 23.43 percent. Consequently, a total of 75 women served in the National Assembly during the 12th Parliament of Kenya, comprising 21% of the members of the assembly. In view of this, women are still underrepresented in decision–making processes at all levels. Like its Nigerian counterpart, Kenyan women are particularly vulnerable to poverty, gender-based violence, and harmful cultural attitudes and beliefs, especially in the household and community (Kenyatta, 2023).

8.4. Uganda

According to the World Bank report in 2022, women constitute 50.47% of the total population of Uganda. Lack of justice and protection against violence against women is a significant gender gap in education. Ugandan women have a lower social and political status than men. They don't have equal rights, particularly surrounding land ownership and marriage. But, after the president took over in 1986 following a brutal civil war, the women's movement pushed for increases in female political representation at all levels. Today, women hold 56% of Local Government positions, 33% of Parliamentary seats and 43% of the cabinet positions. On this note, the inclusion of women's representation in the Ugandan government is a double sword.

9. Women and Political Participation in Nigeria

The essence of political participation in any society, either civilized or primitive is to seek control of power, acquisition of power, and dispensing power to organize society, harness and decision-making in line with organized or individual interest (Arowolo and Abe, 2008). Okoli (2004) perceives political participation as a "freedom of expression" association, right to the free flow of communication, right to influence the decision process, and the right to social justice, health services, better working conditions, and franchise opportunity". Political participation is one of the key ingredients of democracy in its real sense. Political participation entails, voluntarily taking part in politics. Participation should be encouraged across the board in a democratic state. Women play diverse roles and political functions. However, in carrying out their duties, women encounter different and sometimes needless difficulties. The

underrepresentation of women in politics and factors that constrain their participation are core concerns for many scholars. Because participating in politics will provide for women to articulate their experiences in a society where politics is mascularized and women's subordination to male authority is considered vine in Nigeria. Women also find it difficult to break into political positions because they are generally disadvantaged by gender, ideology cultural practice, and predetermined social roles assigned to women and as well as poor children, inadequate health care, and poverty. Arolowo and Aluko (2010) assert that Nigerian husbands are often reluctant to support their wives' decision to engage in active politics and women themselves believe that political participation would negatively impact the ability to perform their primary duties.

According to Nwakwor and Nkerewem (2019), 2018 data shows that women's rate of participation in formal decision-making remains one of the lowest on the continent and across the world with women occupying an abysmal 5.6 percent (86 out of 1534) of all elective positions at both the national and sub-national levels. Nigeria women did not relent in their efforts to develop and in equal terms with men, especially in the political field. In an attempt to sensitize and attract more women to the political field, women adopted slogans such as "What a man can do a woman can do better" and behind every successful man there is a woman. These set the pace for the emancipation of women from patriachial inhibitions against gender equality in preparation for more inclusive participation in policy and decision-making processes. However, women have continued to be underrepresented in all political positions irrespective of efforts made to overcome such challenges. According to our observation, the outcome of the 2019 general elections showed that women are only active in voter registration, political rallies, campaigns, and voting during elections. But, contesting for political offices has not yet been fully actualized in Nigerian politics. According to Onyeji (2019), women's activities are not reflected in their vying for and attaining leadership positions. Despite these efforts by women, they are still underrepresented in governance. Sadie (2005) went further to contend that despite that political parties incorporated gender equality in their constitutions, it has not manifested in their party structure.

10. Democratic Governance, Women's Participation, and Representation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-2023)

The return of democratic governance heaved a sigh of relief to the generality of Nigerians. With democratic governance, it was hoped the myriads of nation-building challenges confronting the post-colonial history of the country will be addressed. Equally, it was hoped, that liberal democracy through constitutional arrangements will address the disequilibrium in men/women representation and participation in the country's electoral politics. Sadly, after seven (7) election cycles, the number of women's representation and participation in the country's electoral process is worrisome, as Nigeria is yet to affect the 30 and 35 percent women affirmative action as prescribed by the 1995 Beijing Women Conference and the National Gender Policy. In the country's legislative elections, beginning from 1999 when democracy was returned to the conduct of the 2023 general election, women are grossly underrepresented in the National Assembly. The table below gives the statistical analysis.

Table 1. Number of Women Elected to the country's National Assembly, 1999-2003

S/N	Electoral Year	Senate	Percentage	House of Representatives	Percentage
1	1999	3	2.8%	13	3.3%

2	2003	4	3.7%	21	5.8%
3	2007	9	8.3%	27	7.3%
4	2011	7	6.4%	25	6.8%
5	2015	7	6.4%	22	6.11%
6	2019	7	6.4%	10	2.78%
7	2023	3	2.8%	16	4.44%

Source: *Report by the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (2023)*

Statistical analysis of the above table revealed that in the country's legislative politics, women have continued to trail behind men. For instance, during the 1999 general election's, three (3) women constituting 2.8% were elected as Senators out of the one hundred and nine (109) senatorial seats and thirteen (13) women in House of Representatives out of the three hundred and sixty (360) Federal House of Representatives seats making up 3.3%. During the 2003 general elections, the number increased slightly as four (4) women (3.7%) were elected in the Senate and twenty-one (21) (5.8%)in the Federal House of Representatives. In the 2007 electioneering year, the number increased as the National Assembly had nine (9) (8.3%) female Senators and twenty-seven (27) (7.2%) female members of the Federal House of Representatives— the highest since the return of democracy. In 2011, female representation decreased as the National Assembly had seven (7) (6.4%) women in the Red Chambers and twenty-two (22) (6.8%) women in the Green Chambers. The number continued to decrease as during the 2015 National legislative elections, the National Assembly had seven (7) (6.4%) women that were elected to the sente and twenty-two (22) (6.11%) women in the House of Representatives. Worrisome to note, was the continuous decline in the number of women representations in the National Assembly as the 2019 parliamentary election had only seven (7) (6.4%) women in the Senate and ten (10) (2.78%) women in the Green Chambers of the National Assembly. Lastly, during the 2023 National Assembly elections, three (3) (2.8) percent women were elected to the Senate and sixteen (16) (4.44%) women in the Federal House of Representatives.

Back to the States' Houses of Assembly, the number of women representations is abysmally poor. For instance, in the 1999 general elections, out of the nine hundred and seventy-eight (978) contestable seats in all the thirty-six(36) states' Houses of Assembly, men won nine hundred and sixty-six 966 (98.8%) while women won only twelve (12) (1.2%) positions (Adeleke, 2015). In the 2003 general elections, out of the available seats in all the states' Houses of Assembly, women won 39 (4.0%) seats and men occupied 912 (96.0%) seats (Salauel at, 2021). Similarly, in the 2007 general election, out of the nine hundred and ninety seats in the states' Houses of Assembly, women won fifty-four (54) (5.5) percent seats and men won nine hundred and thirty-six states representing 94.5 percent (Adeleke, 2015). During the 2011 general election, sixty-eight (68) women were elected as state legislators (Chukwu, 2013, Olurode, 2013), while in the 2015 general election, women won forty-four seats in the states' Houses of Assembly election (Salauel, 2021). The poor representation continued in the 2019 general election as women won only forty (40) seats in state parliaments across the country (Onyeyi, 2019). In the just concluded 2023 general election, out of the nine hundred and eighty-eight(988) seats across the thirty-six (36) states of the federation, only forty-eight (48) women won elections, representing 4.85 percent in twenty-one (21) states (Daily Trust, 2023). Some states like Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Imo, Jigawa, Rivers Osun, Zamfara, Yobe, Kebbi, Niger, Abia had no female state lawmaker represented.

In the executive cabinet politics at both state and federal levels, women have remained in the back seat. For instance, from 1999-2023, women are yet to produce an elected executive governor in any of the states in the six geopolitical zones in the country as shown in the table below.

Table 2. Number of Gubernatorial seats won by each sex across the six (6) Geopolitical Zones in the Country from 1999-2023.

S/N	Year	Geopolitical Zones	Women	Men
1	1999-2003	North West: Sokoto, Katsina, Zamfara, Kebbi, Jigawa, Kano & Kaduna	-	30
2	2003-2007	North East: Borno, Yobe, Bauchi, Gombe, Adamawa & Taraba	-	24
3	2007-2011	North Central: Benue, Plateau, Niger, Nasarawa, Kogi &Kwara	-	24
4	2015-2019	South West: Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo & Ekiti	-	27
5	2019-2023	South East: Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Imo & Ebonyi	-	22
6	2011-2015	South/South: Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Akwa-Ibom & Cross River	-	25
Total:			**-**	**152**

Source: Salau, J.A (2023)

The above indicates that men have dominated women in the gubernatorial politics of the country. Between 1999-2023, women are only elected as Deputy governors in states like Ogun, Lagos, Akwa-Ibom, Adamawa, Imo, Plateau, and Rivers. It was only in Anambra State that a woman (Dame Virginia Ngozi Etiaba), a then Deputy Governor was sworn in as the governor of the state to Mr. Peter Obi based on the illegal impeachment of the governor, Mr. Peter Obi. However, her stay in office was so (2 November 2006 to 9 February 2007) when the Appeal Court nullified the impeachment of Mr. Obi and restored him to office. With this development, Nigeria has been ranked one of the lowest countries in female participation in politics across the globe with 6.7%

11. Challenges Facing Women's Participation in Nigerian Politics

Nigeria cannot claim to be a democratic country until there is visible evidence in practical terms, a practical turnaround in the condition of women generally and that they have been empowered to have access to all aspects of governance as equal partners with their male counterparts. This has, therefore, made attaining elective and appointive positions in government highly competitive and nearly out of reach for women do not have equal opportunities as men do accumulate wealth and increase their economic base. Despite ranking as one of the biggest democracies in the world, Nigeria's record in terms of equitable representation of women in politics falls short. Women account for less than 10% of elected offices in the country. The World Population (1995) states that in many societies women are still considered less valuable than men. The Nigeria Government (2005) established the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) program to address the need of women and their exclusion from the benefit of development and also to provide gender equality. Despite all these efforts by the Nigerian Government, women are still limited in access to schooling. The relative's low participation of women folk in development efforts has become a global concern.

Out (2008), opined that Nigerian women's contribution is not maximum as their work has tendered to be confined to the perception of women's status. Agbalajobi (2008), gender inequality is one of the pervasive forms of inequality because it is present in most societies. Different factors have been identified as the challenges factors have been identified as the challenges or conditions affecting women in participating in the political process.

According to our observation, electoral violence and political instability is employed to distract women's attention from participating in politics, sometimes they are beaten up, their family member's are threatened, their marriages are set up for destruction and these strategies scare women from the political race. Women are limited to their political powerlessness. Since Nigeria gained independence elections has always been surrounded by violence. Violence committed against women in particular is said to impede progress in achieving development. The political system in Nigeria has historically been characterized by violence, uncertainly; fear, and harassment of women in the electoral process in the sense that men are the occupants of the majority of the political positions in the country and this constitutes a major impediment to women's aspiration of government within the country (Olatunji 2022). According to our view, electoral violence, thuggery, and hooliganism are serious deterrents to women's participation which resulted in insecurity in the country.

According to George (2019) women's ability to engage politically both within and beyond the voting both particularly as community organizers and elected officials is often shaped by norms that drive wider social structures. Fundamental to the constraints that women face is an entrenched patriarchal system in which family control and decision-making powers are in the hands of males. Traditional beliefs roles and status in society remain strong particularly in rural areas (Sadie, 2005). Traditional roles and the division of labor are still clearly gendered social norms that make it more difficult for women to learn their traditional domestic roles for more public roles outside of the home (Kasa et al 2015). Women's gender identify is still predominantly conceived to serve as a barrier to women's entry into formal parties. Also the socio-economic status of women to a greater extent plays a significant role in enhancing their participation and representation in political decision-making bodies (Kassa, 2015). Women lack the economic base that would enhance their political participation. The lack of an economic base for women has been a factor in their participation or lack of it in politics because the cost of campaigning is very high. Lack of financial resources can limit elections. Independent funding and placing a limit to campaign spending may support women in overcoming the barriers to political participation which lead to the high cost of election.

In our view, gender stereotyping and religious limitations are another major barrier to women's Political Participation in Nigeria. Any view on gender Stereotypes has found that, many young women avoid the public space primarily because the morality of women in leadership positions is often questioned. The preference of male over female leadership is largely shaped by both religious and gender inequality institutions. Furthermore, the low level of women's education is also part of the shortcomings.

In addition, apart from the above challenges, Nigerian women lack the spirit of sisterhood which seriously militates against their struggle for political relevance. Traditionally, Nigerian women are known for drawing strength from one another especially for when it comes issues that affect their collective interest. Unfortunately that unity of purpose is not found among women during elections. Rather, they are more interested in campaigning for men than lending support to their fellow women. Again, discriminatory laws, gender blind policies, lack of political will patriarchy god-fatherism,

male dominated party executives, timidity, and corruption. The above factors are among the numerous problems women face in Nigeria and unless they are dealt with women would continue to experience hurdles in their political aspirations.

12. Possible Solutions to Issues Affecting Women's Participation in Nigerian Politics

Women are nation-builders in Nigeria as elsewhere in the world. The involvement of women in politics and the policy-making will usher in a new period of peace and stability which has eluded the country. There is need for women to be deeply oriented to brush their perception about politics. According to Onyeji (2019), in a democracy "participation is power" women need to consider this statement, make up their minds, to form a united front and advocate for their human rights because women's rights are human rights. For women to remain relevant in politics, there is need to review the 1999 constitution, political parties structure designed to keep a hold on power. Also, the federal government should make it mandatory that certain public offices be allocated to women on equal basis. This will dissolve any form of discrimination of women by men. Consideration should also be given to women when it comes to the issue of purchasing a nomination form during the period of elections.

13. Feminist Theory and Its Role in Promoting Women's Political Empowerment

Feminist theory aims to understand gender equality and focuses on gender politics, power relations, and sexuality. Most feminist theory also focuses on the promotion of women's rights and interests. Yet, the concept of "feminism" connotes different meanings to different people. It also evokes different emotions depending on the issue at hand (Igube, 2004). In whatever form or manner feminism displays to distinguish itself. What is constant in all its shackles is the determination of every group to uplift womanhood and strive toward the liberation and emancipation of women Agbalajobi (2008). Another organization worthy of mentioning that has identified itself with the women's liberation movement is the organization known as Women's Rights Advancement and Project Alternative (WRAPA). Sani (2001) said WRAPA was registered in 1999 and it is a Non-governmental Organization that aims at counseling, giving access to education for the girl child uplifting of their fundamental rights, and advocacy for law. Furthermore, from the women's suffrage movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to the women's liberation. Movement of the feminism is typically associated with a particular historical moment when a coalition of women succeeded in bringing issues of gender, equality, sexual oppression, and sex discrimination into the public arena. However, Feminism has been defined as advocacy for special equality for men and women.

Feminism is generally opposed to patriarch and sexism (Igube 2004). At both, the national and international levels, there is a growing academic interest in the level of participation of women in politics the third wave of globalization emphasizes the issue of democratizations women and human right which dominate world interest in Africa. African women especially in Nigeria are exported and marginalized. Despite women constitute about 50% of the total population (NPC, 2011). Moreso, some women stood up to fight against injustice towards women in Nigeria of which Aishat Yusuf was among. Aishat Yusuf was a political activist/feminist who stood up during (2020) Endsars protest in Nigeria to fight against injustice and brutal killing of the youth in Nigeria. Her major purpose of taking those steps was to make women voice heard and at a point in time she was advised to aspire for the past of vice president. In general women's traditional/cultural and religious challenges, include practices such as widowhood

practices, wife inheritance, female genital mutilation, male child preferences, malnutrition, lack of access to food other stereotypical beliefs in male and female child upbringing and education (Jega, 2001). Therefore, this study adopts the feminist framework as the anchor theory because of its relative proficiency in gender analysis and the status of women as well as its potential for the promotion and protection of women's rights and indeed gender equality and the empowerment of women which are the necessary pre-requisite for national development.

14. Conclusion

The overarching conclusion from this review highlights that the number of women elected to public offices in Nigeria may not significantly increase after the 2019 general elections. Analyses reveal that Nigerian women have encountered numerous challenges in venturing into politics. Chief among these challenges is large-scale socio-cultural discrimination from men, evident in the processes of candidate selection, voting, and allocation of political offices. With men dominating political party hierarchies, they hold considerable influence over internal party politics, placing women at a disadvantage.

As the 2023 general elections have come and gone, each political party has employed strategies to secure victories. To make gender parity a reality, political parties must begin by practicing internal democracy, fostering an environment where gender equality is supported and advanced. Stakeholders are advised to implement measures that protect and empower women, as highlighted by Karuru (2001). Moreover, the lack of an economic base for women has been a major barrier to their political participation, given the high costs of campaigning. Women's full participation is essential, not only for their empowerment but also for the advancement of society as a whole.

To address these challenges, there is a need to review the 1999 constitution to advocate for greater representation of women at the party level. This includes actively identifying, training, and building women's capacity to lead, contest, and advocate for gender and social issues. Women should also strive to overcome the psychological barriers of patriarchy through education, empowerment programs, mobilization, and networking. Additionally, mentoring and training programs should be initiated to prepare women for political work and enhance their political skills.

The government must take proactive steps to address the culture of electoral violence and the use of political thugs and gangsters, which often suppress women's political participation. Special attention should also be given to women with disabilities, ensuring that they can exercise their civic rights, including voting. Online political participation and voting mechanisms should be developed to encourage greater involvement of women in the political process. Furthermore, voter education programs should be prioritized to improve women's understanding of the importance of political participation and their orientation toward active engagement in governance.

By addressing these issues and implementing the recommended measures, Nigeria can foster an inclusive political environment where women are empowered to contribute significantly to the democratic process. This will not only promote gender equality but also ensure a more equitable and progressive society for all.

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