

WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: A POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR APPROACH

ALKALI FATIMA

Department of Political Science
Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University Lapai
alkali_fatima@ibbu.edu.ng
08132241188

Abstract

Since 1999, the number of women in both elective and appointive positions in Nigeria have been regrettably low. Several studies have explained the reasons for the low participation and performance of women in politics such as sociocultural and religious practices, unhealthy political environment and political party discrimination. None of these studies have placed much emphasis on the political behaviour of women towards women participation in politics. This paper therefore will critically examine the behaviour of women towards women participation in politics. The paper used secondary sources of data and qualitative content analysis as its method of data analysis. The paper found out that women oppose the participation of their fellow women in politics due to religious beliefs, customs and traditions and most notably, individual sentiments such as greed, envy and jealousy. This paper concludes that until there is a change in the political behaviour of women towards women, women participation and performance in politics will continue to low. The study recommends that quotas should be introduced to increase women participation and political parties in Nigeria should guarantee active women participation in party leadership positions by setting aside slots exclusively for women as well as rotating key party positions between the male and female gender.

Keywords: Political Participation, Political Behavior, Politics, Nigerian Women

Introduction

Nigerian women make up nearly half of the country's population. But despite the salient position they occupy by virtue of their population, women roles in the society are yet to be given due recognition. This can be attributed to factors such as cultural stereotypes, abuse of religion, traditional practices and patriarchal societal structures. According to Orji et al (2018), the awareness about the role of women in development of the Nigerian nation came up in 1980s. In the global scene, the International Conference on women was held in Beijing in 1995 which proposed a 30 percent affirmative action for women. Despite the effort being made by our sister countries in Africa to bridge the gap between men and women in politics, successive Nigeria governments have not considered it necessary to implement this affirmative action. While the recent election of female presidents in Africa, Latin America and Europe is being hailed by many as a seminal movement for the advancement of women in politics. In Nigeria,

the situation is different. The roles of men are more highly valued than those of women when it comes to politics (Banerjee, 2003).

In Nigeria, women make up about half of the country's population and about 51 percent of women are involved in voting during elections. Despite these, women are still under represented in both elective and appointive positions. Available statistics revealed that overall political representation of women in government of Nigeria is less than 7 percent (Agbalajobi, 2010). This shows that Nigeria has not attained 30 percent affirmative as prescribed by the Beijing Platform of Action. Since 1999 when Nigeria returned to civil rule, the country has conducted six general elections (in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019). Lack of progress with women's political representation in Nigeria is surprising considering the enormous role women play in the country's socio-economic and cultural landscape. Though these roles appears to be increasing; it is expected that the increasing role of women in the society would translate to greater inclusion of women in the political process but the reverse has been the case.

Balanced participation of women in politics and government is essential to building and sustaining democracy (Nekola, 2006). Democracy cannot truly translate into development for all of its citizens if half of the population remains under represented in the political space. Generally, Nigeria has a policy environment that would appear to support gender equity. Firstly, the country is party to most of the international conventions on gender equality and women empowerment. Secondly, successive governments in the country have established a vibrant institutional structure for the development and implementation of gender policies, coordinated by the Federal Ministry of women affairs and then, several non-governmental organizations and activists have sprouted over the years, intensifying the campaign for gender equality in the politics yet all efforts have ended in fruition as the participation of women in Nigerian politics have declined since the last 20 years. While several scholars have attributed this to a lot of factors, this paper intends to focus on the behavior of women towards women participation in politics (Nekola, 2006).

Conceptual Clarification

Politics

The concept of politics have been subjected to intensive debate by various scholars. Politics refers to a set of activities associated with the governance of a state, country or an area. Put differently, it encompasses the totality of all processes and actions that is directly or indirectly related to achieving and exercising positions of governance and organized control over a human community, particularly a state. Politics has been famously defined as the struggle for power. In response to this, Nnoli (1981) argued that the struggle for power exist in different settings in society such as in families, in religious groups, in places of work and so on. As such, it will be inappropriate to refer to politics as the struggle for power. According to him, politics is the struggle, consolidation and exercise of state power. Here, the meaning of politics is strictly confined to activities related to the state. In David Easton's view, politics is the authoritative allocation of value. To Harold Lasswell, politics is who gets what, when and how. To Austin Ranney, Politics refers to all activities involved in the governing of men. In this modern era, politics have come to be seen as an activity carried out by both men and women who are members of political parties and other political organizations, including states, non government organizations (NGO) and international organization such as the United Nations.

Political Behaviour

The term political behaviour is defined as any action regarding authority in general and government in particular. It refers to all forms of individual or collective involvement in the political process, or any activity that has political implications in relation to policy and government. This definition is broad because it embraces both legitimate forms of political participation such as (voting in elections, activism in interest groups, or social movement) and illegitimate political activities (including coup detat, terrorisms and revolutions). Political behavior also involves analysis of political ideologies, values and attitudes as the basis of participation and non-participation in the political sphere. In political science, political behavior is the study of the way people think, feel, and act towards a particular political process,

event and phenomenon. Political behavior is often associated with a behavioral approach in political science which places strict emphasis and preference to studying individual behaviour rather than structures, adopting the methods and tools of science such as survey and quantitative techniques in the study and analysis of political phenomenon (Munroe, 2002)

Political Participation

Political participation is a major form of political behaviour. Political participation is defined as the extent to which individuals use their various rights such as the right to protest, right to free speech, right to vote, to influence or to get involved in political activity. Political participation can be subdivided into two: conventional political participation and unconventional political participation. Conventional political participation takes place within the norms and traditions of a particular country; therefore, we say it is normal, conventional and customary. By and large, it is the less aggressive of the two. The best example is the act of voting. Other forms of conventional political participation include attending a political meeting, being a member of a political group or a political party. Unconventional political participation tends to move outside the norm and the traditional, and be more aggressive, more assertive and may even break the law. It is also more radical. The best examples are protests and demonstrations that are confrontational rather than peaceful. (Idika, 2010)

Nigerian Women in Politics.

According to Ako-Nai (2005), women are highly under represented at most levels of government, especially in ministerial and other executive bodies, and have made little progress in attaining political power or in achieving the target endorsed by the Economic and Social Council of having 30 per cent women in positions at decision making levels by 1995 (UNO,1996:109) despite global advocacy for the involvement of women in politics. While the Beijing Platform for Action seeks 30 per cent share of decision making positions for women only 16 countries attained this objectives in the 1990s (Amanor-Wilks, 2002:10). In Africa, according to data compiled by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, four countries that came closest to achieving 30 per cent female decision makers in 1997 were Seychelles (27 per cent), South Africa (25 per cent) Mozambique (25 per cent). (Orokpo, 2018) In Nigeria, the case is different. In the first Republic, no woman was able to win election into the federal legislature, though three women were elected into the Eastern House of Assembly in the 1961 regional elections. In the Second Republic, the only female Senator, Franca Afegbua, was elected into the Senate in 1983, she however, served for only three months before that Republic collapsed. In 1992, out of the 300 gubernatorial aspirants during the transition programme of Ibrahim Babangida, only 8 were women, representing a paltry 2.6%. None of them was able to make it to any of the Government Houses, as all the states were won by men. Also, of the party executive positions of the parties that existed then, women had only 4% (Orokpo, 2018).

Clarke (2006:19) asserted that women constitute over half the population in Nigeria and therefore ought to have adequate representation in government. She reasoned that the little number of public leadership positions occupied by women demonstrates marginalization which affects their meaningful contributions to the political process. Oyiwe (2001:16) also maintained that women have power that there is no reason why women should not occupy top positions since politics determine who gets allocation of different amenities and women must of necessity be part of decision-making. The appalling situation as posited by Okafor (1998:5) is that Nigerian women find themselves in a hostile political environment so unconducive that they feel despaired and discouraged to participate or vie for leadership positions in the governance of this nation. Notwithstanding, the heroic roles played by the likes of Queen Amina of Zazzau, Inikpi of Idah, Madam Tinubu of Lagos and Moremi of Yoruba land, Funmilayo Ramsome-Kuti, Hayiya Sawaba had, indeed helped to further confirm the fact that women have great potentialities which can be put to good use in politics and other spheres of national life. In modern Nigeria, names like those of Sarah Jubril, Hannatu Chollom, Margaret Icheen, Titilayo Ajanaku, Josephine Anenih, and a host of others deserve commendation for their roles in politics. Importantly, the likes of Late Professor Dora Akunyili, Ngozi Okonjo-Iwela, Oby Ezekwesli, Nennadi Usman, Farida Waziri, Amina

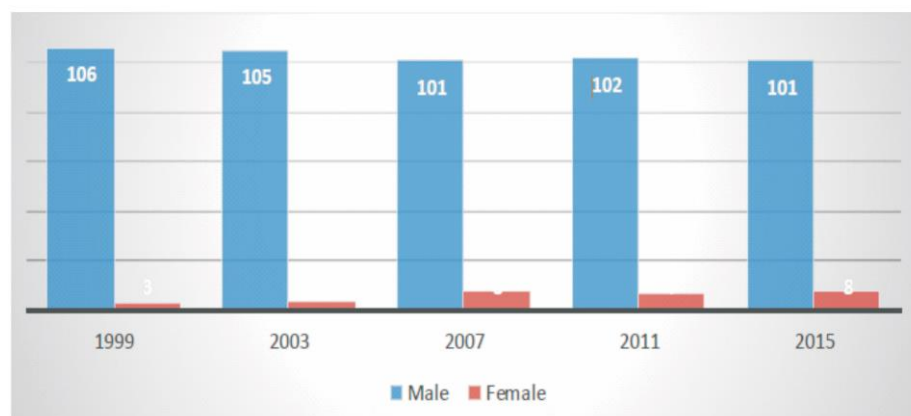
Muhammed, and a host of others too have proved their mettle in various areas of human endeavour and national development. It is against this backdrop that Okafor (1998:5) posited that any nation that does not create an atmosphere of equal political participation is obviously building obstacles of overwhelming complexity that can hardly be crossed except by men and women whose kernels are cracked by benevolent political spirits.

Despite the fact that the problems of women in politics may not be completely tackled, there is a strong hope that, at least the tempo of political women can be increased to a manageable level. Okafor (1999:5) therefore maintained that it was high time; women redirected their attention to the struggle for political power, asserting that they should understand that the struggle required doggedness, dedication and sound initiative. Women should be proactive and determined if they want to be successful politicians (Asase, 2003). The role of women in Nigeria's post independent politics has not been reflected sufficiently, in terms of appointments in policy-making posts. In spite of massive support given to various political parties by women, women organizations, market women movements among others, until recently, very few women benefited from political patronage. This is because more often than not, men constitute larger percentage of the party membership and this tends to affect women when it comes to selecting or electing candidates for electrons since men are usually the majority in the political party hierarchy, they tend to dominate the political hierarchy and are therefore at advantage in influencing the party's internal politics (leadership, 2010:24).

Matrix of Women in Politics since 1999.

Women's low participation in Nigeria has several implications for the politics in Nigeria and for the continuing quest for gender equality. In Nigeria, about 51 percent of women are involved in voting during elections. Despite these, women are still under represented in both elective and appointive positions. Statistics revealed that women's overall political representation in government of Nigeria is less than 7 percent (Agbalajobi, 2010). This clearly indicates that Nigeria has not reached 30 percent affirmative as prescribed by the Beijing Platform of Action. Since the return of democracy in 1999, the Senate has been dominated by males. In 1999 there were only 3 women out of the 109 members representing 2.8 per cent of the members of the Senate. In 2007 the number increased to 8 (7.3 per cent). However, there was a decrease from 8 women members in 2007 to 7 in 2011 which is 6.4 per cent and 8 (7.3 per cent) in 2015. .

Figure 5.1: Member of Senate by Sex (1999-2015)

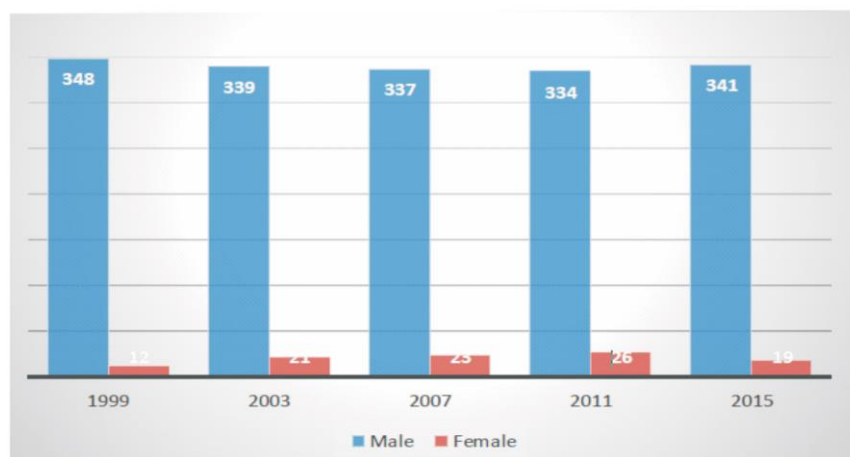


Source: NBS(2016).

On the other hand, the number of women in the House of representatives was 12 out of 360 members which was about 3.3 per cent but increased to 21 (5.8 per cent) in 2003. There was 26 women in nthe

house of representatives (which amounts to 7.2 per cent) in 2011. In 2015 the number of women in the House of representative decreased to 19 (which is 5.3 per cent) out of 360 members.

Figure 2: Member of House of Representatives by Sex (1999-2015)



(Source NBS, 2015)

Today, women are still seen as poor political and social problem solvers and therefore incompetent leaders. Despite the huge contribution they have made in developing the country, they are still relegated in both elections and appointment into public offices. Again, available statistical data from 1999 general elections to date shows that politically, women are disempowered. This means that an insignificant percentage compared to their population is involved in the decision-making process of the country

Figure 5.3 Elective Positions held by women 1999-2015.

Office	1999		2003		2007		2011		2015	
	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women
President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Vice President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Senate	109	3(2.8)	109	4(3.7)	109	8 (7.3)	109	7(6.4)	109	8(6.4)
House of Reps	360	12(3.3)	360	21(5.8)	360	23(6.4)	360	26(7.2)	109	19(5.3)
Governor	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0
Deputy Governor	36	1(2.8)	36	2(5.5)	36	6 (16.7)	36	3 (8.3)	36	4
State House of Assembly	990	12(1.2)	990	38(3.8)	990	52(5.3)	990	62(6.3)		
SHA Committees Chairpersons	829	18(2.2)	881	32(3.6)	887	52(5.9)	887	—		
L.G.A Chairpersons	710	9(1.2)	774	15(1.9)	740	27(3.6)	740	—		
Councillors	8,810	143(0.02)	6368	267(4.2)	6368	235(3.7)	6368	—		

Source: NBS (2016).

In the 2019 federal elections- Presidency, Senate and House of Representatives- women's candidature was abysmally low. Although women make up 49.4 per cent of Nigeria's population, according to data from the National Bureau of statistics, women political representation in the 2019 elections was low compared to their population. There were 2,970 women on the electoral ballot, representing only 11.36

per cent of nominated candidates. For the presidential elections, men dominated women on a 12:1 ratio. At the National Assembly, women's candidature was only 12 per cent of the total seats available, given that a total of 763 women are vying for seats for the Senate and House of Representatives out of 6,563 places available. 235 women, forming 12.34 per cent of candidates, contested for a seat in the Senate of which seven (6.42 per cent) were elected. This remained constant in the 8th Senate, which also accounted for 6.42 per cent of the total number of elected senators. In the House of Representatives, 533 women contested, with the major parties fielding a total of 31 (15 APC and 16 PDP) candidates. However, only 11 (3.05 per cent) have been elected. The figures from the 8th House have thus been halved, as it had 22 female lawmakers. At the state level, no woman was elected governor. They formed 3.07 per cent of the total candidates. Of the 275 women forming 11.40 per cent of candidates for the Deputy Governorship, four (in Enugu, Kaduna, Ogun and Rivers) were elected. Thus, the number of female deputy governors has declined from six in 2015 to four in 2019. In Lagos, women have consistently held the position of the deputy governor but the emergence of Hamzat Obafemi in the 2019 elections marks a departure from previous feat. In the state legislature, 40 women have been elected into the state assembly as against the previous number of 55. All these points to the fact that women participation in politics, rather than improve, has declined despite all the efforts both at national and international level to increase their participation in politics. Of the 84 million registered voters expected to vote in the 2019 election, women accounted for almost 40million which is 47. 14 per cent.

Challenges to Women Participation in Politics in Nigeria.

The challenges to women active participation in politics in Nigeria are multifaceted. Some of these challenges are discussed in this section. Firstly, Institutionalized socio-cultural and religious practices in Nigeria skewed in favour of men and against women is one of the most serious challenge to women active participation in politics. Women (including Nigerian women), according to Muoghalu and Abrifor (2012), are discouraged from participating in public life from childhood through adulthood by authority figures such as religious leaders, husbands, fathers, mothers and other relations. In fact, the virtuous woman in most african societies is defined as quiet, submissive who should be seen and not heard. In christianity, there is a quotation in the bible which says that "let your women keep silent in the churches for it is not permitted unto them to speak but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law and if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home for it is a shame for women to speak in the church". In Islam, it is said that a woman is made from the cropped part of the ribs of a man. Therefore, men believe that women cannot come out, and should not compete against them. For instance, in Northern Nigeria, the purdah system (i.e. house seclusion of women) of the Islamic doctrine strictly bars women from participating in politics either as voters, political aspirants or even participating in campaigns/other electoral activities. However, when it comes to the issue of political leadership and formulation of government policies women's role in Islam is limited to supportive and advisory (Nwankwo and Surma, 2008). Also, the Christian doctrine does not accord women much role in public life. The Bible refers to them as weaker vessels. The patriarchal nature of the Nigerian traditional society makes most Nigerians including women to still believe and adopt the traditional perspectives that view women as subject to men, second class citizens, weaker sex, to be seen and not heard, child bearers/primary care-givers, etc. In most cases, they feel the game of politics is an exclusive reserve of men and dare not venture into it and those who manage to venture are usually contented with the back seats (Ngara et al., 2013).

Secondly, financing politics in Nigeria, especially seeking elective position is an expensive venture requiring huge financial commitments and solid financial support. Generally, most women are poor and this relatively pathetic poor financial disposition of Nigerian women is a critical challenge which mostly accounts for their poor participation in politics and political defeat in elections. About 90% of women in Nigeria, according to Ngara et al. (2013), currently live below poverty line, so in spite of concession granted by some major political parties which lowers the cost of obtaining party nomination forms for women into elective office, nonetheless, the cost of realizing electoral ambition is still far beyond the reach of even the most highly placed women in the absence of "a godfather who foots the bill in

exchange for unlimited favour when the seat is eventually secured” (Yahaya, 2012). As a matter of fact, finding godfathers who will be willing to support women will be a hard task. Considering the financial backing, the godfathers' and other financiers of politicians in Nigeria prefer male candidates to the female counterparts based on the traditional assumption that political activities are masculine and male candidates are believed to stand better chance of winning elections. In Nigeria, the women poor access to credit facilities, lack of inheritance rights for developmental purposes; including culturally unacceptable control of their income and resources while living with their husbands contribute to their lack of financial strength as a major challenge in their active participation in politics.

Thirdly, unhealthy Political environment is another challenge to women active participation in politics in Nigeria. Politics in Nigeria is do-or-die affair. It is fraught with violence, maiming, assassinations, threats, blackmail, intimidation, humiliation, etc which are used by mostly men to scare women away from active participation in politics in Nigeria. Involvement of thugs before, during and after elections (Kolawale et al., 2012), and the attendant insecurity such as destruction of lives and properties that characterized a typical electoral process in Nigeria makes politics something out-of-the-way for most women (Ngara et al., 2013). An illustration of electoral violence in Nigeria is the testimony of a female aspirant, Dorathy Nyone who narrated that “a ward chairman was shot dead; all the women and most of the men fled the scene. My husband rushed there and took me home. I was scared; men who were fully prepared for violence were the only ones who remained behind to hand pick the various winners” (Luka, 2011). Nigerian women have over the years become targets of violence of diverse forms based on their positions in promoting transformative politics (Agblajaobi, 2010).

Fourthly, political party discrimination in Nigeria is another impediment to women participation in politics. The hierarchy, membership, and funding of all the political parties are dominated by men. This has made it possible to gain an upper hand in influencing the party's internal politics and often relegating women to the back. The manifestos and constitutions of political parties in Nigeria hardly gives room for affirmative action for women, and when they do, their commitments are lower than the bench mark set by regional and international conventions. Party discrimination against women in Nigeria is often a deliberate effort to humiliate and frustrate them into losing focus and sidelining them from participating in politics. For instance, political meetings are held mostly late in the night and serious politicking which involves a lot of traveling automatically exclude mostly married women from active participation in politics. The chances of women to be voted into key positions in the political party hierarchy is very small. The highest position held by women in a number of key political parties include most insignificant posts of ex-officio members and women leaders whose importance is only for mobilizing other women to vote for men. Thus, they are usually unable to assert themselves or push for the interest of women during nominations leading to marginalization of women during election. In addition, most Nigerian political parties marginalize and discriminate against female political aspirants by excluding them from politics through traditional methods based on male-centred interpretation of culture, religion and sharp practices of “zone out” and “step-down techniques mainly for women. The “zoning” technique is where a political party simply zones out the seat of a female aspirant to constituency she is not regarded as an indigene while “step-down” technique is where a female candidate who has clearly scaled through party nomination and is eligible to contest an election is simply asked to step down for a more suitable candidate which are mostly men. Political parties do not make room for nominations of women. As evidenced in the activities of the two major parties in Nigeria, the discrimination against women from the male counterparts in selecting, electing or voting for candidates for elections and in allocating political offices which most often tend to relegate women to the background is a critical challenge to women active participation in politics.

Lastly, there is a commonly held perception in Nigeria that women who are actively participating in politics are seen and treated as free women. The term "free women" has been associated with prostitutes. Regrettably, women in politics are seen as women of easy virtues, stubborn persons, whores, too domineering, traditional rebels, etc. To a large extent, it has even been observed that during political campaign, men use the alleged loose moral standing of these women against them and often insult them

directly in public. One time, a male senator has even threatened to beat, slap and even rape his female colleague if she continues opposing him. Thus, they are often subjected to public ridicule and are politically stigmatized by both men and their fellow women. The use of derogatory labeling and names; insulting language and expressions to describe Nigerian women in politics discourage many of them from active participation in the nation's politics.

Women as Threats to the Success of Women in Politics

Female political aspirants and politicians in Nigeria receive limited support from their fellow women. This is a major challenge to the active participation of women in politics. Aside men being fierce opponents of women participation in politics, it is even more regrettable that women in Nigeria do not have mutual confidence in the leadership abilities of their fellow women and do not support them to win elections. This is prompted by factors like envy, jealousy, and other problems associated with interpersonal relations that women are commonly known for, generally, most women would rather vote or support men to win election than their fellow women in spite of their numerical strength (Ngara et al., 2013) and such is applicable to Nigerian women. However, this has placed the Nigerian men at an advantage over their women counterparts when it come to garnering support for elections. In Nigeria, "a very good instance of this scenario was the case of Mrs Sarah Jubril, who contested against the President Goodluck Jonathan and former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar in the Peoples Democratic Party presidential primaries to the 2011 general elections. When the results were announced, Sarah Jubril got a miserable one vote -obviously an own vote. This meant that even female delegates at the party primaries did not vote for her (Ngara et al., 2013). However, many Nigerian women psychologically regard and adopt the commonly held negative connotation that politics is a "dirty game" and as such tend to wrongly perceive fellow women into politics as dirty, arrogant and irresponsible and in their actions and inactions, work towards pull them down.

Conclusion

From the above discussion we have seen that we have seen that women participation in politics in Nigeria is low due to socio-cultural and religious factors, financial factors, undesired political environment and wrong notion about women in politics. This paper also adds that women are a threat to the success of women in politics due to personal sentiments like envy, greed and jealousy. It is unfortunate that despite increasing calls and efforts towards promoting gender equality in the political sphere, the situation in Nigeria has been regressive. It is even more worrisome that women are in themselves an obstacle to increasing women participation in politics. It is therefore the position of this paper that until women change their attitude to their fellow women and begin to support them, increasing women participation in politics will continue to be a pipe dream

Recommendations

The use of gender quotas has proved to be one of the most successful means for getting more women into office thus, fixed quotas should be introduced in Nigeria both for elective and appointive positions. Political parties in Nigeria should guarantee active women participation in party leadership positions by setting aside slots exclusively for women as well as rotating key party positions between the male and female gender. Women activists should intensify efforts towards sensitizing and mobilizing women through a well thought out women for women campaign initiative. Women should disregard ancient customs and traditions that are against women participation in politics because they are now outdated.

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