

WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The low level of participation of women in both elective and appointive positions since the return of Democratic Rule in 1999 has been a source of growing concern to many Nigerians. However, concerted efforts have been made by government and non-governmental organizations to increase the level of participation of women in politics in line with the declaration made at the fourth World Conference on women in Beijing, which advocated 30% affirmative action. The National Gender Policy (NGP) of Nigeria recommended 35% affirmative action seeking more representation of women in both elective political and appointive public service positions. The under representation of women in political participation gained root due to the patriarchal practice inherent in our society, much of which were obvious from pre-colonial era till date. However, with the return of democratic governance, there has been a marginal increase in women political participation both in elective and appointive offices. The national average of women's political participation in Nigeria has remained 6.7 percent in elective and appointive positions, which is far below the Global Average of 22.5 percent, Africa Regional Average of 23.4 percent and West African Sub Regional Average of 15 percent. For instance, out of the 43 recently confirmed ministerial appointments by the senate, only seven (7) are women. Of the 1,487 total available elective positions in the 2019 general elections, there were 26,137 candidates of which women were only 2,970, representing 11.36% and of this number only 62 won representing just 4.17%. Against a historical background of women political marginalization, this paper seeks to examine the level of participation of women on the Nigeria political scene since 1999 with a particular focus on their performance or lack of it in the 2019 general elections. What is responsible for their less participation or parochialism for instance, patriarchy, stigmatization, meeting schedules, low level of education, financing capability, political violence, religious and cultural barriers and how do we chart the way forward. These include a review of discriminatory practices, economic empowerment of women, support from family, fellow women, and media, equal representation in governance, and proper perception of women in politics.

Keywords: Politics, Women, Democracy, Patriarchal, and political participation.

Introduction

Poor participation of women in politics and governance has been a major concern at global level. In Nigeria, women participation in politics is not proportionate to the 50% of the nation's population which they represent and has not translated into equal representation in political leadership positions. The situation persistently falls below the recommended 30% of the Beijing Platform of Action and 35% recommendation of National Policy on Women in Nigeria.

Also, Nigerian women have the guaranteed rights to participate in active politics and governance by virtue of Section 42(1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which states that: "A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person be subjected to any form of discrimination. This further confirms that you can go to court to seek redress if as a woman your franchise is violated and that the constitution as a whole prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex".

However, over the years, there has been a remarkable increase in women participation when measured with certain standards like the number of women who vote in elections; the number of appointive and elective positions held by women; number of women related policies implemented by government; and so on. Yet, there is observed extensive discrimination against women and under- representation of them in politics and governance in Nigeria when compared with their male counterparts in actual practice.

Historical Background

Pre-colonial era

Politically, in the pre-colonial era, Nigerian women were an integral part of the political set up of their communities. For instance, in pre-colonial Bornu, women played active roles in the administration of the state, complementing the roles played by male counterparts. Also, Women also played a very significant role in the political history of ancient Zaria. The modern city of Zaria was founded in the first half of the 16th century by a woman called Queen Bakwa Turuku. She had a daughter called Amina who later succeeded her as Queen. Queen Amina was a great and powerful warrior. She built a high wall around Zaria in order to protect the city from invasion and extended the boundaries of her territory beyond Bauchi and she made Zaria a prominent Commercial Centre. The story was not different in ancient Yorubaland, where Oba ruled with the assistance of a number of women referred to as female traditional chiefs. They consisted of eight titled ladies of the highest rank. The significant role played by prominent women such as Moremi of Ife, Emotan of Benin and Omu Okwei of Ossomari, cannot be ignored. Moremi and Emotan were great amazons who displayed wonderful bravery and strength in the politics of Ife and Benin respectively, while Omu Okwei dominated the commercial scene of Ossomari in present day Delta State.

Colonial Period

Colonialism affected Nigerian women adversely as they were denied franchise. It was also only in the 1950s that women in Southern Nigeria were given franchise. Three women were appointed into the House of Chiefs, namely Chief (Mrs) Olufunmilayo RansomeKuti (appointed into the Western Nigeria House of Chiefs); Chiefs (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo and Janet Mokelu (both appointed into the Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs). The women's wings of political parties possessed very little functional relevance. (Kolawale et al, 2013).

The Post-Colonial Period

During this period, Nigerian women began to play very active roles. In 1960, Mrs. Wuraola Esan from Western Nigeria became the first female member of the Federal Parliament. In 1961, Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo contested and won the election, becoming a member of the Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly till 1966, Mrs. Janet N. Mokelu and Miss Ekpo A. Young also contested elections and won, they became members of the Eastern House of Assembly. In northern Nigeria, however, women were still denied the franchise even after independence until 1979 that is, the return of civilian government. As a result of this denial, prominent female politicians like Hajia Gambo Sawaba in the North could not vote and be voted for.

Second Republic (1979-1983), saw a little more participation of women in politics. A few Nigerian women won elections into the House of Representatives at the national level and also few women won elections into the State Houses of Assembly respectively. However, During the same period, only two women were appointed Federal Ministers. They were Chief (Mrs) Janet Akinrinade and Mrs Adenike Egun Oyagbola, Minister for Internal Affairs and Minister for National Planning respectively. Mrs. Francesca Yetunde Emmanuel was the only female Permanent Secretary (first in the Federal Ministry of Establishment and later Federal Ministry of Health). A

number of women were appointed Commissioners in the states also. In 1983, Ms Franca Afegbua became the only woman to be elected into the Senate. Also, very few women contested and won elections into the Local Government Councils during this period.

The 1990 transition elections into local governments heralding the Third Republic saw few women emerge as councilors and only one woman emerged as Chairperson of a Local Government Council in the Western part of the country. During the gubernatorial elections, no female governor emerged in any of the states. Only two female Deputy Governors emerged, namely: Alhaja Sinatu Ojikutu of Lagos State and Mrs. Cecilia Ekpenyong of Cross River State. In the Senatorial election held in 1992, Mrs. Kofo Bucknor Akerele was the only woman who won a seat in the Senate. Very few women won election into the House of Representatives. One of these few was Chief (Mrs) Florence Ita Giwa who won in the Calabar Constituency.

President Babangida's Transitional Council appointed two women in January 1993, namely Mrs. Emily Aig- *Imoukhuede* and Mrs. Laraba Dagash. In the Interim National Government of Chief Ernest Shonekan, two female ministers were appointed into the cabinet. General Abacha administration also had a number of female ministers at various times in his cabinet, including Chief (Mrs) Onikepo Akande and Ambassador Judith Attah. During the military regime of General Abdulsalami Abubakar (June 9, 1998 - May 29, 1999), there were two women in the Federal Executive Council: Chief (Mrs) Onikepo Akande (Minister for Commerce) and Dr. Laraba Gambo Abdullahi (Minister of Women Affairs), (Kolawale et al, 2013).

Re-introduction of Democracy (The Fourth Republic)

The past two decades have witnessed an impressive rise in women's political representation around the world, with the global average in the share of women in national parliaments doubling during that time, and all regions making substantial progress towards the goal of 30 percent women's representation in decision making¹ (IPU, 2015). Nowhere in the world has the rate of increase in the political representation of women been as fast as in Sub-Saharan Africa. Four of the world's top 10 countries, in terms of women's share of single or lower house of parliament, are in Sub-Saharan Africa: Rwanda, Seychelles, Senegal, and South Africa. While some African countries are making giant strides in women's political representation, others like Nigeria have achieved very little progress. Since 1999 when Nigeria returned to civil rule, the country has conducted five general elections (in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2015), of which the record of women's political representation has been somewhat mixed. As table 1 illustrates, Nigeria achieved the highest percentage (7.0 percent) of women's representation in the lower parliament (the House of Representatives) in 2007 after the dismal record of 3.4 percent and 4.9 percent in 1999 and 2003, respectively. However, the figures declined to 6.8 percent and 5.6 percent in 2011 and 2015. It should be noted however, that following the conclusion of a number of election petition cases by 2017, the figure went up to 6% (22 in the House of Representatives and 7 in the Senate).

Table 1: Women In Nigerian Parliament

World Ranking	Election Dates	House of Rep seats	Women	%	Election Dates	Senate Seats	Women	%
181	03.2015	360	20	5.6	03.2015	109	7	6.5
125	04.2011	360	24	6.8	04.2011	109	7	6.4
117	04.2007	360	25	7.0	04.2007	109	9	8.3
107	04.2003	360	17	4.9	04.2003	109	3	2.8
104	02.1999	360	12	3.4	02.1999	109	3	2.8

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women in National Parliaments"

The return of democracy in May 29, 1999 gave hope for a new dawn in the struggle for more participation of women in Nigeria politics. Democracy is about fair representation of all interest groups in the society and the low representation of women is a violation of the principle of democracy. Despite all efforts put in place, we are yet to meet the 30% and 35% affirmation as contained in Beijing platform for action and National Gender Policy respectively. There have been five administrations between 1999 and 2015. President Obasanjo occupied the office of president between 1999 and 2007, President Umaru Musa Yaradua (2007-2010), President Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2011; 2011-2015) and President Muhammadu Buhari (at present). The position of vice president in Nigeria followed the same trend as that of the president. Four males have dominated the seat since the return of democracy in 1999.

The Senate and House of Representative

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.

Member of House of Representative

In 1999, the number of women in the House of representative was 12 out of 360 members which was about 3.3 per cent but increased to 21 (5.8 per cent) in 2003. It was 26 (7.2 per cent) in 2011, in 2015 the number of women in the House of representative decrease to 19 (5.3 per cent) out of 360 members.

How Women Fared in the 2019 Elections

Nigeria's population is estimated to be 200,923,640. (UN, 2019) Women form 49.4% of this figure, with a total of 99,180,412. However, female political representation in the 2019 elections was negligible relative to the approximately half of the population they constitute. 2,970 women were on the electoral ballot, out of a total of 26,137 representing only 11.36% of nominated candidates. Of this number, only 62 women were elected, a meagre 4.17% of elected officials. This represents a decline from the 2015-19 period, where women formed 5.65% of elected officials. A breakdown of the figure given by INEC showed that while only seven women were elected into the Senate during the 2019 elections, the House of Representatives has 11 women. While four women were elected as deputy governors, 40 women were elected into the 36 state Houses of Assembly.

Table 2 : Female elected positions, candidates and representation by major party

Positions	Total Number of Candidates	Number of Positions	Number of Women	%	APC Female Candidates	PDP Female Candidates	Total Women Elected
President	73	1	6	8.22%	0	0	0
Vice President	73	1	22	30.13%	0	0	0
Governors	2,412	36	74	3.07%	0	0	0
Deputy Governors	2,412	36	275	11.49%	2	3	4
Senate	1,904	109	235	12.34%	7	10	7
House of Rep	4,680	360	533	11.39%	15	16	11
States House of Assembly	14,583	944	1,825	12.51%	28	39	40
Total	26,137	1,487	2,970	11.36%	52	68	62

Source: Centre for Democracy and Development. March, 2019

In contrast to the reduced total of female elected officials, female nominations for the presidential ticket witnessed unprecedented increments, with six women vying for the presidential position up against 67 men. They are Obiageli Ezekwesili of Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN); Angela Johnson of Alliance for a United Nigeria (AUN); Olufunmilayo Adesanya-Davies of Mass Action Joint Alliance (MAJA); Rabia Hassan of National Action Council (NAC); Eunice Atuejide of National Interest Party (NIP); and Maimuna Maina of Nigeria Peoples Congress (NPC). As Table 1 shows, 8.22% of the total Presidential candidates were women. The recent trend has been a single

female presidential candidate. In 2015, this was Prof. Oluremi Sonaiya contesting the position with 13 men. In 2011, it was Mrs. Ebiti Ndok up against 19 presidential candidates. In 2007, Major Mojisola Adekunle Obasanjo (Rtd.) contested against 26 men. However, in 2003, two women out of 20 presidential candidates made it to the ballot – Mrs Sarah Jubril and Major Mojisola Adekunle Obasanjo (rtd). In the 2019 elections, women also formed a significantly higher 30.13% of Vice-Presidential candidates, there were 22 of them. On the one hand, the disparity between Presidential and Vice-Presidential figures could suggest female candidates are being fielded as tokens by fringe parties. On the other hand, such a phenomenon could also represent shifting societal views on gender norms seeping into politics. Events leading up to the elections should dampen some of the positive sentiment around these figures. Specifically, all six female candidates stepped down before the National Elections. Furthermore, the two leading parties did not field a woman for either position on the presidential ticket. Arguably the most popular female candidate, Dr. Oby Ezekwesili stepped down from the ticket of the Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN), allegedly over issues of party finance. Almost immediately after her withdrawal, ACPN announced the adoption and backing of incumbent and APC candidate Muhammadu Buhari.

For elections into the National Assembly, there were 768 female candidates representing 11.66% of a total of 6,584, 3.84% (18) of which have been elected. 235 women forming 12.34% of 1,904 candidates contested for a seat in the Senate of which seven (6.42%) were elected. This is a drop from the 8th Senate, where women accounted for 6.42% of the total number of elected senators. The two dominant political parties fielded 17 (7 APC and 10 PDP) female senatorial candidates. Many of these women lost at the general elections, including the only female senator in northern Nigeria, Binta Mazi Garba. Her claim to fame arises from being the first politician to represent two different federal constituencies, Kano and Adamawa states. Finally, the minority leader of the 8th Nigerian Senate, Senator Abiodun Olujimi, also lost her reelection bid.

Figures from the House of Representatives elections show a steep decline from the 8th House. For the House of Representatives 533 women out of 4,680 candidates, representing 11.33% contested out of which 11 or 3.05% were elected, with the major parties fielding a total of 31 (15 APC and 16 PDP) candidates, representing 11.39% of nominees. However, only 11 (3.05%) have been elected. The figures from the 8th House have thus been halved, as it had 22 female lawmakers representing 6.11% of candidates.

At the State level no woman was elected governor. They formed 3.07% (74) of the total contestants (2,412). Of the 275 women forming 11.40% of candidates for the Deputy Governorship of 2,412, four (in Enugu, Kaduna, Ogun and Rivers) have been elected namely; Hon. Lolo Cecelia Ezeilo, Dr. Hadiza Balarabe, Engr. Noimot Salako-Oyedele, and Dr. Ipalibo-Harry Banigo respectively, representing 11.11%. Thus, the number of female deputy governors has similarly declined from six in the 2015-19 regime to four. While women have consistently held the Lagos Deputy Governorship since Princess Sarah Adebisi Sosan (2007-11), APC's winning ticket fielded a man (Obafemi Hamzat) for the post, bucking the trend.

Down from 55 female state lawmakers in the first term of the incumbent regime, 40 women have been elected into the state assembly pending polling in some states. As Table 3 shows, of the 62 women in elected positions, PDP has the highest number with 33 (51.61%), then APC with 23 (37.10%) AA and APGA each have two (3.23% each). ADP and APM both have one elected official representing 1.61% each. The representation of women at the state legislation dropped from 3.70% in the 8th Assembly to 2.49% in the 9th Assembly.

Table 3: Female elected positions per party.

Positions	Total Candidates	No. of Positions	Electe d APC	Electe d PDP	Electe d ADP	Electe d APM	Electe d AA	Electe d APGA
President	73	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vice President	73	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Senate	1,904	109	2	5	0	0	0	0
House of Rep	4,680	360	8	2	0	0	0	1
Governor	2,412	36	0	0	0	0	0	0
Deputy	2,412	36	2	2	0	0	0	0
State Assembly	14,583	944	11	22	1	1	2	1
Total	26,137	1,487	23	33	1	1	2	2

Source: Centre for Democracy and Development. March, 2019

Challenges Affecting Women Participation in Politics in Nigeria

The challenges facing women are enormous, however, researchers have shown that the under listed are likely responsible for the huge marginalization of Nigerian women in politics.

Patriarchy: It refers to a society ruled and dominated by men over women, which in turn has given rise to women being looked upon as mere household wives and non-partisans in decision making process in households not to talk of coming out to vie for political positions. There is a consensus in the literature that generally in Africa, women are socialized into passive civic and political roles in the family. This is then subsequently reinforced by the wider society based on cultural precepts that portray publicly active women as cultural deviants. In Nigeria, women political leaders are not just seen as cultural deviants, but there is very little public confidence in their capacity to perform. The World Values Survey (for the period 1994-2014), which measures support for gender equality in political leadership, shows a consistent conviction among the respondents that "on the whole, men make better political leaders than women do."

Stigmatization: following the way politics in Nigeria is played, it is being perceived that it is for individuals that have no regards for human right and are quick at compromising their virtue for indecent gains. Therefore, women aspirants who ventured into politics are looked upon as shameless and promiscuous.

Low level of education: The low participation of women in education is also part of the shortcomings. The National Adult Literacy Survey, 2010 published by National Bureau of Statistics

revealed that the adult literacy rate in English in Nigeria is 50.6 per cent while literacy in any other language is 63.7 per cent (female adult age 15 and above). This explains why most women are least qualified for political offices due to low educational attainment. This is also an effect of colonialism, where men were more favoured than women. In addition to basic education, many women lack the political training required to participate effectively in the political arena. This leaves them with very little capacity such as political and interpersonal skills and knowledge, public speaking, organizing and coordinating campaigns, and advocacy and negotiation.

Meeting Schedules: The time scheduled for caucus meetings to strategize and map out political plans either for the pre or post- election periods are odd and is not conducive for responsible and family women. The slated time are often time which women are expected to take care of their children and family. This method of schedules is viewed as an attempt to side-lining women from engaging in political process.

Financing: Competing for political positions in Nigerian requires huge financial backup. Most Nigerian women who seek these positions could not afford meeting the financial obligations therein, despite the wavers giving to women aspirants by some of the political parties. And so, they could do little or nothing to outweigh their male counterparts.

Political Violence: Nigerian elections have always been characterized by one form of violence or another since the return of democracy. Female aspirants of various political parties cannot withstand political violence; therefore, women participation in politics is drastically reduced.

Religious and Cultural barriers: Both Christianity and Islam do not accord women much role in public life, and same is obtainable in most cultural values, where women are seen culturally as quite submissive and image of virtue. However, they are not to be seen in public domain. And so it is a challenge to women participation in politics, more so, women found in the corridor of politics are not often religious in practice.

Conclusion

The global issue of goal 3 (to promote gender equality and empower women) of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other international clarion calls for bridging the gap created by long-term discriminations against women and making women visible in politics made Nigeria to recognize women in the political sphere, and include them in both appointive and elective positions. It is no doubt that women still remain highly marginalized, discriminated against; and are under-represented in political life of the nation. This is more obvious when the proportion of men to women in politics and decision making positions is compared despite the fact that women represent 50% of the nation's population. Several challenges that Nigerian women still face in active participation in politics such as discriminatory socio-cultural and religious practices; lack of finance; under-representation of women in governance; unhealthy political environment; political party discrimination; wrong perception of women in politics; lack of family, fellow women and media support; indigenization of women political aspirants; among others, have been identified as responsible for this state of affair. Thus, the recommended measures to guarantee women active participation in politics in Nigeria included review of discriminatory practices; economic empowerment; support from family, fellow women and media; equal representation in governance; healthy political environment; proper perception of women in politics, among others.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations are made.

Review of Discriminatory Practices

Discriminatory socio-cultural and religious practices against women active participation in politics in Nigeria should be positively reviewed by stakeholders (particularly traditional/religious rulers and government) who should be educated to be gender sensitive and encouraged to protect women political and other rights and ensure support of their political ambitions. These stakeholders should ensure that cultural/religious practices that discriminate against women are discouraged and their perpetuators are adequately punished to serve as deterrent measures.

Economic Empowerment of Women

Women should be given equal access to credit facilities and factors of production like land and labour just like men to enhance their output and income generation. The discriminatory laws of inheritance, succession and land tenure; and collateral of husband's consent for granting loans to women which deny them the legal ownership and possible access to credit facilities should be eliminated. In addition, government should adopt and strictly enforce deliberate policy frameworks and empowering programmes by all stakeholders.

Support from Family, Fellow Women, and Media

Family members (especially husbands of married women) should give women political aspirants the relevant consent and support to venture into politics and governance. Through awareness campaign and voters' education programmes, women should be informed of their political rights to participate actively in politics not only as voters but also to be voted for in the numerous political positions and be encouraged to support and vote for their fellow women political aspirants/politicians. Furthermore, media should support Nigerian women political aspirants/politicians by publicly projecting their positive images; emphasizing their important roles and contributions to national development; raising their participation awareness in politics and governance; deploring discriminations against them; among others. The gender stereotypes in the media should be discouraged.

Equal Representation in Governance

There should be equal representation of Nigerian men and women in governance to ensure that enacting laws of the land and making policies particularly those affecting gender issues will always remain equitable. There should be enabling Constitutional amendment to ensure equitable appointive and elective positions in governance for meaningful national development. The national legislations should comply with International standards established in various international treaties and instruments for elimination of discrimination against women and to capture the interest of women through adequate representation. Political empowerment, especially through the strengthening of affirmative action and allocation of quota for Nigerian women in politics and decision making positions should be strictly implemented to encourage their active participation in politics.

Proper Perception of Women in Politics

The use of negative labelling, derogatory names, abusive language and expressions to describe women in politics should be discouraged through sensitization and public enlightenment campaigns in Nigeria. The campaigns of male political opponents that portray Nigerian women as

acting against the Nigerian culture of not accepting leadership roles of women just to marginalize them should be discouraged. In Nigeria, women in politics should be properly perceived as partners of their male counterparts in politics and governance of the nation

Less Emphasis on Regroupings

Women should de-emphasise the idea or attitude of forming sub-groups within a larger group as this will only re-echo the belief of being weaker sexes. A situation where you have forum of women legislatures, forum of women ministers, and so on should be discouraged as this will only re-affirm the assertion that they, as individuals cannot match their male counterparts shoulder to shoulder.

In addition to the above, the following measures should also be taken to address the problem.

- The introduction of electoral gender quota for the recruitment and election of female candidates as the most appropriate institutional change required to enhance women's political representation. Related to this is the adoption of strong quota regulations and sanctions for non-compliance.
- Introduction of proportional representation with multiple-member constituencies, as this has been found to be favourable to promoting equal opportunities for women and men candidates.
- Adoption of legislation and policies supporting a more gender-balanced representation in elected bodies at local and regional levels.
- Adoption and implementation of gender action plans by Political Parties
- Review of internal rules and procedures of Federal and State legislatures, including the facilities and working conditions, rules for leadership recruitment, etc. to encourage more inclusive participation.

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