

Women and Political Participation in the Nigerian Fourth Republic, 2019-2023

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ABSTRACT

Women participation in Nigerian politics has been a major concern as a result of limited number of women in both elective and appointive political positions. There have been efforts by government, non-governmental organizations, and different women movements to improve women political participation. Such efforts include the National Gender Policy (NGP), which recommends 35% affirmative action, seeking for a more inclusive representation of women in public service positions. This is in line with the Beijing Declaration during the Fourth World Conference on women which advocated 30% affirmative action for women in politics. Despite these efforts, there is still a very low percentage of women representation in politics in Nigeria. The national average of women's political participation in Nigeria is as low as 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. While many factors, including the patriarchy nature and politics, Nigeria has been blamed for the low women political participation, there has been a dearth of study on how the political party system could be a major factor militating against women political participation in the country. Thus, to fill the identified gap in literature, the study examined how the political party system in Nigeria served as a constraint to women political participation. The study is a qualitative research. Liberal feminist theory is adopted for the study. The findings showed that most of the women in political positions were facing challenges associated with the female gender, including intimidation, harassment and biases.

Keywords: feminine, party system, political participation, women representation.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has over the year operated a multi-party system of government. This was practice during the First Republic (1960-1966), the Second Republic (1979- 1983), the aborted Third Republic (1987-1993) and the Fourth Republic (1999 – to date). It was this same system that was recommended during the Abdulsalami Abubakar's transition to democracy between 1998 and 1999. General Abdulsalami Abubakar became Nigeria's tenth Head of State when General Sani Abacha mysteriously died in office in June 1998. A less ambitious Military, General Abdusalam Abubakar, surrounded by immense political goodwill and democratic orientation both locally and internationally, initiated a new transition to democracy that commenced on 29 May, 1999. Because of the centrifugal consequences of the ethno-regionalization and the personalization of party politics, particularly between 1951 and 1965, Nigeria has moved, since the constitutional and political reforms of 1975-1979, from a functional definition of a political party to a legal-constitutional one, which primarily defines party more in terms of structure than of functions, with emphasis on structural requirements for political party registration as (i) national outlook and spread; (ii) internal organization or democracy, and (iii) recognition and registration by an electoral body. But as Nigeria's experience since 1979 has shown, there are limitations to the social engineering assumptions of the structural definition of party (Jinadu, 2011).

Parties are expected as key instruments of democratisation in political participations. The emphasis on women participation in politics has been a lingering agitation, to shed fresh light on some of the political features and

the chronological events of the past as regards women's recognition in politics could help critical analysis of the current dynamics of the political environment, including the features, origin, nature, organisation and ideological tendencies of the political parties in the periodic transitions. Despite the recommendation and advocacy as regards the percentage of women in political participation, women's faith plummeted from 7% downward which raises the following questions; how does political party system constrain women political participation? Can independent candidacy in elections improve women political participation in Nigeria? The paper seeks to provide answer to the salient issues.

The problematic statement is that, Nigeria has been recording low participation of women in both elective and appointive positions at different levels of government despite the fact that, about 51 percent of women are actively involved in voting during elections and in spite of political consciousness of women, they are still under represented. Available statistics revealed that overall political representation of women in Nigeria government 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. The low representation despite the high participation of women in political landscape in Nigeria has gained root looking at it from the patriarchal theory of the emergence of state inherent in our society, much of which were obvious from pre-colonial era till date. However, concerted efforts have been made by government and non-governmental organizations to increase the level of women participation in politics. The objectives of this research therefore is to; examine how political party constrain women political participation; evaluate how independent candidacy in elections improves women political participation in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of political party has been variously defined by different scholars but depending on their perspective. Political parties fulfil a number of vital functions that help a multi-party democratic system function. Parties serve essential functions including aggregating citizen interests, forming governments, developing and promoting policy positions and programmes and grooming and selecting political leadership (Carothers, 2006). Nnoli (2003) defines political parties as a group of people who share a common conception of how and why state power should be organized and used. Political parties have also been conceived as an instrument for contesting elections for the purpose of selecting candidates and parties to exercise political power (Yaqub, 2002). A political party is simply a body of organized individuals whose ultimate aim and goal is to contest for governmental power through the instrumentalities of elections. While it should not be mistaken that the mere existence of political parties presupposes that a society is democratic or otherwise, however, competitive and periodic elections have come to at least define the character of liberal democracy (Momoh, 2013).

Indeed, a political party is differentiated from other aggregations of people such as pressure groups because it does not only seek to take over the business of government through constitutionally accepted means, but is also expected to have a relatively longer period of active life. Nigeria practices federalism modelled after the United States. The president has executive powers, while legislative powers reside in the National Assembly made up of two chambers – a 360-seat of House of Representatives and a 109-member Senate. The current constitution was adopted in 1999 when the country transitioned to a civilian administration following 16 years of military rule. For most of its political history, Nigeria was not famous for smooth democratic transitions and change in administrations. Typically, the ruling party, unwilling to lose elections, would strive to stay in office at all costs or the military would intervene after disputed elections (National Democratic Institute, 2021).

In 2015, however, the country achieved a milestone when the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) lost the presidential election to the opposition, All Progressives Congress (APC), and administrations changed peacefully. This transition moved Nigeria closer to the threshold of democratization by meeting key criteria, alternation of government by free, fair and competitive multi-party elections and the participation of the electorate through an unrestrained contest for elective positions and the exercise of the right to vote and be voted for by citizens. However, uneven representation and low percentage of women in different political offices both elective and selective at the Federal, State and Local Government remained controversial as women are still given less political recognitions across the levels of government. Nevertheless, this historic

achievement suggested democracy was deepening in Nigeria. However, the trajectory to democratic consolidation, reinforced with the 2019 elections, is problematized by the absence of increased political participation or a broadening of the political space for women. Although formal representation is enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution, women remain underrepresented in elective offices and political leadership positions since the last military Junta about two decades ago.

Women and Political Participation

Women are not only relatively invisible in the political landscape, but also remains an intractable notion among Nigerians, including women themselves that, politics is a conquered territory only for male and women who venture into it are ‘outliers’ or negotiating for lower positions. In corroboration with this assertion, the notion and mission of women coming to power especially, elective positions are defeated by the women themselves for their inferiority complex and the uncivil perception of other women that, “it’s only those without husbands can be politically active. The persistence of this idea after five cycles of elections compels an examination of the socio-cultural and institutional apparatus that sustains it and the strategies adopted by the ‘outliers’ to negotiate access to the political space. We focus on this class of Nigerians because the low percentage of women in politics challenges a core principle shared by all democracies, the inclusion of ‘women as equal participants in the decision-making that affects their lives and their communities, is both a rights issue and an issue of fair recognition in participation and democratic integrity (National Democratic Institute, 2021). Women constitute over half of the world’s population and play vital roles to societal development generally. In most societies, women assume some key responsibilities, which are; motherhood, production, and home-management, and community organisation, socio-cultural and political activists and most of these responsibilities mentioned are engendered by women.

Nigerian women constitute nearly half of the population of the country. According to World Bank collection of development indicators, Nigeria was reported at 49.47% in 2021, compiled from officially recognised source. Nigeria population and actual values historical data forecast and projections were sourced from the World Bank, June 2023. More precisely, out of 1000 people, 504 are men (50.4%.) and 496 are women (49.6%), but males have a higher risk of dying than females both in childhood and adult ages and therefore place the population of women over men particularly, in Nigeria. Despite the prominent roles of women in the society, for the case of Nigeria, women roles are yet to be given expected recognition. This is due to some cultural stereotypes, abuse of religion, traditional practices and patriarchal societal structures. In Nigeria the awareness about the role of women in development of a nation came up in 1980s. The International Conference on women in Beijing in 1995 enhanced the effective participation of women in politics in Nigeria.

Nigerian Women and Challenges of Political Participations.

Nigerian politics has consistently underscored and disregarded the issue of marginalisation against women while identifying major hindrances against their political participations. Previous studies focused on how the intersection of socio-economic and cultural norms leaves women on the margins of politics similarly observed by (Arowolo and Aluko, 2010; Okoosi-Simbine, 2012; Pogeson, 2012). There are other specific constraints, such as gender-based violence, in addition to these broad factors (Agbalajobi, 2021). Also, in a study of media visibility of frontline female politicians during the 2015 electoral cycle, Ette (2017) argues that news media engage in systemic reinforcement of patriarchal framing of politics, thus undermining women’s participation. Omojola and Morah, (2014), attributed the media invisibility to news consumption patterns. Most studies on media representation of women echo the assertion of symbolic ‘annihilation’ of women in the new to underscore the invisibility of female politicians in the media. Other specific factors includes low literacy rates (Orisadare, 2019). This hinders women’s awareness of their political and democratic rights; failure of women’s organizations to champion the emancipation and liberation of women (Abdullah, 1993); and political violence (Okoosi-Simbine, 2012).

In our society, paternal’s domination in the area of policy formulation and implementation equally affect the roles of women in political decisions and as a result, brings about less recognitions of women in most sensitive issues within different parties. This is not probably unconnected with individual men’s experiences in their

domestic activities on women's tendencies of domineering attitudes, which may have affected the psych and mentality of men in supporting women in any leading position in political offices at the Federal and State levels.

This may particularly in African countries affect women in party formation or leading a political party in the selection of candidates by political parties. This also corroborated the assertion of Okoosi-Simbine (2012), who opined that, political parties are major obstacles for women who want to contest elections because parties are responsible for selecting candidates. Arowolo and Aluko (2010) asserted that Nigerian husbands are often reluctant to support their wives' desires to engage in active politics, and women themselves believe that political participation would negatively impact the ability to perform their primary duties as caretakers, thus leading to 'broken homes, and breeding of irresponsible children. Still in line with his opinion, is the mentality and the insinuations of many people that, most of the women in political positions and whose their husbands are non-politicians are being influenced by men politicians that may engage some of them in extra- marital affairs' therefore, some people believed that, only women without husband can have absolute freedom for active political involvement which is in line with the likely issues in domestic affairs of women earlier pointed out by the researcher in line 3-5 of the immediate paragraph above. This as well may be affecting women's chances in the selection of women candidates into strong political offices.

The interview conducted shows that, some women do not necessarily run for office to win but run for other strategic interests and popularity. some women candidates interviewed particularly, in Ondo and Ekiti State House of Assembly, the major areas of Study argued that party structures which grant unfair advantages to preferred but novice candidates discourage more competent but less influential women aspirants from persisting in politics, especially given Nigeria's highly unregulated party financing structure that places a huge financial burden on candidates and aspirants. They also pointed out that novice men are as likely to run for ambitious offices as women, but women do not necessarily get noticed because of the larger percentage of men candidates, both novice and experienced.

Theoretical Framework

Liberal Feminist Theory

The theory of feminism is generally applicable to the issue of female gender. However, the appropriate theoretical underpinning to women involvement in politics is Liberal Feminist Theory. Liberal feminism which is also known as *mainstream feminism*, is a main branch of feminism defined by its focus on achieving gender equality through political and legal reform within the framework of liberal democracy and informed by a human rights perspective. This theory has been identified as branch of feminist thought that underscores the imperative of equal rights and opportunities for women. At its core, scholars noted that this theory posits women's subordination is primarily attributable to discriminatory laws, institutions, and social norms, rather than biological differences. The intellectual roots of Liberal Feminist Theory is traced back to seminal scholars such as Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, and Betty Friedan. Particularly, Wollstonecraft's influential book, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" (1792), that advocated for women's education and equal rights, is believed to be the work laying the groundwork for liberal feminist thought. Similarly, Mill's essay, "The Subjection of Women" (1869), that championed women's suffrage and equal rights, (Mills, 2013) and while Friedan's "The Feminine Mystique" (1963) are also credited with launching the liberal feminist movement, specifically in the United States. In order to be considered a feminist theory, it must also recognize gender as a system of inequality; assume that it is a changeable rather than fixed feature of human societies, and most importantly, advocate a commitment to a gender equitable system (Chafetz 2006).

Assumptions

Liberal Feminist Theory is predicated on several key assumptions. Firstly, it posits that equality is achievable through reform, emphasizing the importance of gradual changes in laws, policies, and social norms. Secondly, it asserts that women's subordination is due to external factors, such as discriminatory laws and social norms, rather than biological differences. Thirdly, it stresses the essentiality of individual rights and freedoms,

including women's right to education, employment, and equal pay. Finally, it advocates for women's empowerment through education and economic independence, enabling them to participate fully in society. Feminist theory differs from most sociological theories in two ways. First, it is the work of an interdisciplinary community which includes not only sociologists but also political activists, historians, biologists, psychologists, etc. Second, feminists work with a double agenda- they desire both to broaden and deepen their own discipline; and to develop a critical understanding of society in order to change it for the better (Ritzer 2011) One of the important contributions which feminist theory has made towards sociology is the concept of gender, which it has centralized, and refined (Lengermann and Niebrugge 2007).

The strengths of Liberal Feminist Theory lie in its influential role in promoting women's rights and equality, particularly in the realms of education, employment, and politics.

Criticism of the Theory

However, critics argue that the theory ignores structural barriers, such as capitalism and patriarchy that perpetuate women's subordination. Furthermore, it is criticized for failing to address inter-sectionalism, or the ways in which multiple forms of oppression intersect to affect women's lives. Notwithstanding its limitations, Liberal Feminist Theory provides a vital framework for understanding and addressing women's subordination. Its shortcomings have, however, led to the development of other feminist theories, such as radical feminism, socialist feminism, and intersectional feminism, (Murphy, 2014). which offer more nuanced and multifaceted perspectives on women's experiences.

Relevance of Liberal Feminist Theory to Women Political Participation in Nigeria

Liberal Feminist Theory is rooted in the notion that women in Nigeria deserve equal rights and opportunities, including the right to participate in the Nigeria politics. This theory posits that women's participation in politics of Nigeria is crucial for providing a voice for women to advocating and achieving gender equality and challenging the existing power structures that perpetuate women's subordination in the political landscape of Nigeria.

Since Liberal Feminist Theory advocates for equal access to education, employment, and economic resources, which are essential for effective political participation, Nigeria women are likely going to opt for political participation to attain their interest in this direction.

The theory also emphasizes the importance of Nigeria's women's representation in politics, ensuring that their interests and concerns are represented and addressed in the policy-making process. Furthermore, Liberal Feminist Theory sees Nigeria's women's participation in politics not only as a key strategy for promoting gender equality, but enabling opportunity for them to challenge discriminatory laws and policies, and promote policies and programmes that advance gender equality.

Drawing insights from the Liberal Feminist Theory, women in politics in Nigeria have succeeded in wiping up sentiments that favour them socially, economically, culturally and politically making them to be more encouraged in engaging in political participation. They have been able to propagate the importance of equal rights and opportunities for women, challenging patriarchal power structures, representing women's interests, and promoting gender equality in their struggle for power at different level of political leadership.

METHODOLOGY

The study explored qualitative research by conducting desktop research and in-depth interviews with purposively selected participant observers in Ekiti and Ondo States. Four female members, from House of Assembly, two from each selected state earlier mentioned, representing the two constituencies in each of the State while three female members of academics, a professors from the department of Sociology and one senior lecturer from the department of Political Science, Ekiti State University are both members of Feminist Advocacy Groups and the other Professor was selected from the department of Political Science, Adekunle

Ajasin University, Ondo State, were interviewed to elicit information based on their personal experiences on the subject matter. Collected data was analysed using discursive and descriptive analysis. To realize the objectives stated above, the paper is pigeon-holed into five segments; first is the prologue which chronicled introduction, statement of the problem, objectives and methodology. The second segment examined conceptual and theoretical framework central to the discourse. Third segment focus on the historical background of women and party system in Nigeria, among others, four deals with data presentations, discussions and findings and the fifth segment is the conclusion and recommendations

RESULTS

Data Presentation: Reactions of Women on 2019 and 2023 elections in Nigeria.

In the 2015 general election in Nigeria, women party members and officials take the stage to speak at a rally of the ruling party, All Progressives Congress (APC) for incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari in Abuja, Nigeria on Feb. 13, 2019. Half of Nigeria's population are women, but only 4 percent were elected in the 2019 election and almost the same thing repeated itself in the 2023 election. In 2023 election, the only woman as a presidential aspirant was Uju Ken Ohanenye, among the 23 aspirants, she later withdrew at the election ground from the contest in favour of the eventual winner and national leader of the party, Amed Bola Tinubu. In her withdrawal declaration she opened up that;

"I have decided to step aside for the lifesaver who is Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu," the lawyer and entrepreneur who had previously told journalists that "the touch of a woman is lacking in the governance of this country", said on national. Television (Uju, 2022).

For some Nigerians, it was a step back for gender equality in the country's politics but also a timely reminder of the many hurdles women face in attaining leadership roles in this vast West African country. There were actions and mixed reaction by the public as the aspirant "Ohanenye might have believed she was not going to win because of the financial and political limitations she would have to surpass, as" opined by Antoinette Lecky, Lagos-based media personality and former projects lead at Elect-HER, a non-profit focused on getting more women into political leadership.

Data Presentation and Analysis: Women Representations in Nigeria Politics in the Fourth Republic 1999-2023

Since the fourth Republic till date women's representation in politics has never exceeded 6%. In the current records, Nigeria was ranked 139th out of 156 countries in the list of countries with the largest gender gap. At the beginning of fourth Republic in 1999, Nigeria had the lowest representation of women holding political seats with only 2.5% representation, the highest percentage of women in political offices was achieved in 2011 and again in 2019 with 6% representation each year. On March 1, the first day of the Women's Month celebrations, the National Assembly rejected bills that would have, among other things, increased women representation in politics. Although the assembly finally bowed to pressure and rescinded their decision on three of the bills after sustained protests by groups advocating for the bills, these three did not include those that will increase women representation in the political space. The national assembly is not reviewing its decision on the extra seats for women in legislative Houses and the 20 per cent quota for women for appointment into federal and state cabinets.

In 1999, out of 360 House of Representatives seats, only 12 seats were won by women at 3.3%; in 2003, the number of women in the same House rose to 23 or 6.4%; in 2007, it further climbed to 26 or 7.2%, while in 2011, the number dropped to 19. "For deputy governorship, out of 36 states in 1999, only one woman was appointed, 2.8%; in 2003, the number rose to 2 or 5.5%; it further rose to 6 or 16.7% in 2007, but sharply dropped to 3 in 2011. "Out of the 109 senatorial seats, women won only 3 at 2.75% in 1999; won 4 at 3.7% in 2003; in 2007, it further rose to 9 or 7.3%, while in 2011 it slightly dropped to 7 seats. For the 990 seats in the 36 states Houses of Assembly in 1999, women won only 12 or 1.2%, in 2003, the number rose to 38 or 3.8% in 2007; it further rose to 54 or 5.5% and to 69 or 6.3% in 2011).

The Table below illustrate women's representation in 2019 and 2023 general election in Nigeria.

Table 1: Women's Representation in 2019 and 2023 general Election in Nigeria.

ELIGIBLE VOTERS	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN VOTERS	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	NUMBERS OF WOMEN CANDIDATES	REMARK EMARKS
84 MILLION	47%	15,336	1,524	VERY LOW
200 MILLION	49%	2,970	62 (4.17%)	VERY LOW

Source: Author's Compilation, 2024

Declining of Nigeria women in political participation

Despite clamours for improvement in women participation in public life across the world, Nigeria appears to be moving in the wrong direction. From 1999 till date, only 157 women have been elected into the 469-member National Assembly (38 senators and 119 members of the House of Representatives), compared to 2,657 men (616 senators, 2,041 reps) during the same period. The results of the 25 February presidential and National Assembly elections have further exposed Nigeria's failure to implement several treaties and statutes it signed, which are aimed at ensuring women's involvement in politics. Of the 92 women who contested for the Senate in the February elections, only three won, while out of the 286 who contested for seats in the House of Representatives, only 15 were declared winners. Mercy Abang, the CEO of Host Writer, said;

'the low number of women in elective and appointive positions in Nigeria is directly proportional to the level of development of the voting population. In her observation, she opined, 'Nigeria's political parties are not interested in prioritising issues of women's development, saying decisions still need to be made for women by men, even when women constitute a significant portion on. "Nigerian women have continued to excel in the private sector and are serving in top-level positions globally, yet featuring in public life at home remains a challenge. (Abang, 2023)

In her statement, UN Resident Coordinator in Nigeria, Matthias Schmale, Echoed that Nigeria has produced so many women of excellence across the world and private sector but in public life, Nigeria lags behind most African countries. (Matthias, 2023).

Data presentation: 2023 National Assembly Election

A total of 18 political parties fielded 380 female candidates for the National Assembly elections; 92 for the Senate and 288 for the House of Representatives.

Out of the 92 who contested for the 109 senatorial seats, representing 8.4 percent, only three women won.

Table 2: SENATE

Number of Political Party	Number of Seat	Number of Female Candidates	Elected Fem ale Candidate	Districts
	109	92	1 (APC)	Lagos West
	=	=	1 (PDP)	Rivers West
	=	=	1 (LP)	FCT
18	109	=	3	3

Source: Authors compilation, 2024.

The total number of 1, 101 Senatorial candidates contested for Senate of which 92 (8.4 %) were female candidates while only 3 (3.4%) were elected. Out of the total number of 1,101, only 3 (0.3%) are female Senator and they are newly elected. Therefore for the Senate; 3 of 98 = 3.1%. **Source: INEC**

Women in the Senatorial representation in 2023 General Elections. Only 15 of the 288 women who contested for House of Representatives' seats also won, with eight from the APC; four from PDP, and one each from LP, APGA and YPP. (INEC, 2023).

Table 3: House of Reps

Number of Political Party	Number of Seat	Number of Female Candidates	Elected Female Candidate	Districts
18	325	288	2 (APC)	Lagos West
	=	=	2 (APC)	Benue
	=	=	1 (LP)	Anambra
		=	1(APGA	Anambra
			1 (YPP)	Anambra
			2 PDP	Bayelsa
			2 (PDP)	Delta
			1 (APC)	Borno
			1 APC)	Imo
			2(APC)	Lagos
			1 (APC)	Ogun
				Total – 15

Source: Authors compilation, 2024

The total number of 3,122 for the House of Representatives, only 288 (9. 2%) are women. Out of the 288 female candidates, only 15 (5.2%) are elected while of the 3,122 candidates, only 15 (0.5) are elected female members. And of the 15 members elected, 8(51%) were newly elected while the 7(49%) are re-elected members. Percentage: 4.6 % (15 of 325) Seats in the house of Representative. **Source: INEC, 2023**

In the Data presentation and analysis, representation of Women in the House of Reps at the just concluded 2023 General Elections (Invictus Africa, 2023) According to figures from INEC, the total number of eligible voters rose by 9,464,924 or 11.3 per cent from the 84,004,084 recorded in the 2019 general elections to 93,469,008 in 2023 of which the total registered voters, 49,054,162 or 52.5 per cent are male while the remaining 44,414,846 or 47.5 per cent are female voters. Nigeria, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union Women in Politics Report 2022, ranked 184 out of 192 for women's representation in the national parliament. True to this ranking, there are only 21 women in the ninth National Assembly out of 469 members. At the sub-national level, data from Invictus Africa, (2023) shows that there are only 45 women out of 990 state House of Assembly members; 15 of the 36 states have no female members. The tenth assembly would most likely be worse than the previous ones given the numbers so far. (Invictus Africa, 2023).

Data Analysis and Discussion: The responses of the only two female honourable members, Ondo House of Assembly.

In the interaction with the female members, Ondo State House of Assembly on the issue of female marginalisation in Nigeria political system. In her responses, she was of a strong opinion that;

“Women in Nigeria politics were vehemently side-lined and marginalised politically. She emphasised that women are not yet given the necessary attention in both appointive and elective positions in Nigeria. According to national statistics, it's expected that. Government of any level to grant 35% of the political offices to women but this is far from the laid down target of Nigeria political settings”.

In actual fact, the woman population is in most cases out way the population of man particularly in political consciousness and participation. Women have better voting strengths and always more active during elections as observed by the member, Ondo State House of Assembly, she said further as quoted, *“As a matter of fact, no woman, no vote, but after election, women are always abandoned in the area of resource allocation”*

The other respondent, a female member of Ondo State House of Assembly from Ilaje constituency II reacted with a divergent view to the question *on how women themselves always go against one another whenever the times comes for political support among women*. The Honourable member spontaneously reacted to the question and explicated with much premium on the high level of envy and conspiracy among the women in politics. She therefore narrated her personal experiences on the behavioural patterns of women in Nigeria politics and concluded from her preferences that,

“women are the bane of their political involvement and active participation in Nigeria politics for their jealousy against the achievers among women politicians and as a result, some women are not sincere with the kind of support they give during election”

Assembly, Owo constituency I Owo Local Government and Ilaje constituency II, Ilaje Local Governments, on the question about their personal experiences in politics. There were mixed reactions of the two female honourable members, Ondo State House Assembly. There were narratives, drama, and full of oxymoron as regards their experiences as both sweet and better experiences were x-rayed. Particularly, the Woman legislator from Ilaje Local Government explained some challenges she was facing at the domestic level in taking care of the children and significantly, the husband. She explain further, how she nearly lost her marriage to politics when the husband did not initially believe in the school of thought which prioritise women in politics and she therefore asserted that, husband is a major factors to any married women who is actively involved in politics. In her Statement she said;

“ it’s only few husband that can reason along his wife politicians and allow her to play active politics simply because, seeking political power and influence by any woman may result in abnormal exposure that can induce infidelity of the woman, on this notes, the insinuations of many people against women politicians is that, many women politicians are harlots in order to acquire economic power to influence political power since funding election of strong participation in politics is capital-intensive, she said as quoted in her statement where many cases were exemplified”.

Her counterpart though interviewed differently, buttressed the point and reaffirmed that;

“only women who is not under the authority of any man, can play very active politics because of the nature and dimension of Nigeria politics. She also said further that, it takes high level of understanding and risk for a husband to be at home while the wife is in hotel outside the town for a political meeting as Nigeria politicians always keep vigils in any significant political discussion.”

Although, the honourable did not actually explain her bitter experience as regards domestic challenges, rather positively x-rayed her experiences and achievement in politics as she was two terms woman leader in All Progressive Congress (APC), as Board members, Ondo State Oil Producing Area Development Commission (OSOPADEC) for two consecutive terms. In her statement, the above explained achievement eventually under-laced her giant stride to have triumphed in political life and lame-slide victory as the first female member of Ondo State House of Assembly from Owo Local Government. She explain further that, her achievement are the pathway to her good political career, her leadership skill, she was able to gather through her principals with good principles who also discovered her potentiality.

In her extensive discussion, she believed that women has special purposes in the society particularly in Nigeria and as a result, be allowed to serve in any capacity as she believed in the school of thought of feminism and pointed to the fact that,

“human cannot be trusted except if he or she is given chance to rule or to participate in active politics and governance in any society, though, rulership should denote service to humanity and to optimised all that had been tutored. She opined that, feminism should not be seen as deficiency because the society itself celebrate women because of their productivities and prudence in administration. She advised further that, women should stand tall above other things in the society to grab their potentials. The society should as well regard and recognise women as competent individuals, strong and agile towards nation buildings” (Interview, Ondo State House of Assembly, 2024)

The two female politicians, members of Ondo State House of Assembly contributed complementarily in their response to the questions before them, they both advised, having identified some major challenges as barrier to women's participation in the world politics generally but peculiarly, Nigeria's case is far below the targeted 35% of women participation in Nigeria politics. (Interview, Ondo State House of Assembly, 2024).

The responses of the two selected female honourable members, Ekiti State House of Assembly.

In Ekiti State House of Assembly, there are six female member. Two of these members were selected for interview on the same subject matter with the same interview scheduled for their counterpart in Ondo State. The female honourable represented Ikole constituency I, reacted to the first question on the general opinion about political marginalisation of women in Nigeria politics. She categorically explain that, "it was at the mercy of God almighty and some reasonable and considerate party leaders who acknowledge her active roles in politics, respect for the leaders and more importantly, the loyalty for the individual leader and the party generally. She emphatically stated that, it was her second time of contest for the same position and that, the party leaders in their magnanimity reconsidered their ground and pleaded to my opponent within the party to stand down for in the APC primary election". In her statement based on her personal experiences, she advised the male politicians all over the world. According to her,

"until male politicians denounce their beliefs that, women are weaker sex and as a result, not as being active as male politicians. Until male politicians decided to cede certain percentage of both elective and appointive positions to women so as to meet up with 30% or 35% target for the women in political participation, until women are allowed to be fully involved in the policy formulations and implementation for the country to prove that, women are not actually weaker vessels but not really giving the enabling environment to operate except few in Nigeria particularly under formal president Olusegun Obasanjo, Goodluck Jonathan, even, Muhamadu Buhari' Administration".

By extension, she pushed further by appraising the government and governance since the beginning of the fourth republic in Nigeria and how the above listed administration involved competent and productive women in their administration. She submitted by saying, *"what a man can do, a woman can do it better and therefore, women in Nigeria should be given equal chance to rule"*.

In the same vain, she also contributed immensely to the question raised on how women in Nigeria politics work against themselves. She expatiated on it and how she personally experience betrayer of trust among women friends during the first contest which led to her failure in the previous contest. She also observed that, the derogatory aspect is the defamation of characters by some vendettas to score some points of loyalty from godfathers. Not only that, the issue of women politicians as harlots as many people believed, particularly, those women who did not have the political opportunity or influence have the attitude to run down the fortunated ones by offering dirty languages and malignant statement against themselves, such like *"I cannot use my body to beg politicians because of positions."* The honourable Mrs, also stressed the issue of women's characters within the party as a major determinant to their nomination for any sensitive position in the public places all over the world. In her analysis, she gave many example of women that lack humility and respect in their party particularly, the few wealthy ones that are up to the task but arrogant in their approaches whenever issues come up in political meetings. These types of women according to her,

"Those that are politically inclined may be difficult to be trusted in any sensitive position, and as a result, the issue goes beyond man marginalising women politically, but the behavioural patterns of some women work against their chances in politics."

The second selected female honourable member of Ekiti State House of Assembly who also contributed brilliantly to the question raised on different issues. She aired her opinion particularly, a divergent view on the issue of marginalisation. In her argument, she said, "There are different levels of political participations and involvement in politics. In her interesting analysis, she opined that, political participation goes beyond gathering women for political rally in different uniforms to campaign for a particular party or candidate. She analysed some factors to be considered in political participation and involvement, ranging from money, political party, party structure, personality and characters among others. It is only few women who are ready to be active in politics that actually possess the above mentioned qualities unlike men.

She also observed the issue of husbands as major factors as many of them may not endorse their wives active involvement into politics, especially those husband who are very exposed to political activities and understand what obtains in political market and more so the uncontrollable exposure of women into multi-dimensional harassments in politics also contributed to low participation and women's involvement in active politics. In her submission, she said that, *'women don't normally come out up to expectation'* and sited her personal practical experiences as she came out before election, carry out awareness, contested, with the assistance of elders in the party and defeated her male opponent overwhelmingly. She urged women to come out and test their political ability and be consistent in politics, because, *'quitters shall never win and winners shall never quit'* said the honourable. (Interview, Ekiti State House of Assembly, 2024).

The responses of a woman Professor, Department of Sociology, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti, on her view on gender inequality on political participation in Nigeria.

She is a Professor of Sociology, and former Director of Gender Studies, now the provost, Post Graduate Studies. In her own contribution said as quoted;

'she is quite agreed that, women are not always in the mainstream of participation in politics. This is as a result of the time devoted for meetings may be very difficult for women to play active roles in politics. Not only that, poverty has become feminised that, they don't have the expected resources as far as election is concerned and the tactics adopted in Nigeria politics, women don't have money even to mobilise people for their support, therefore, the culture in Nigeria politics doesn't favour women in Politics''

According to the professor, I can therefore as a sociologist evaluate that, there is gender inequality in Nigeria political participation. Despite the fact that Nigeria is signatory to the UN declaration of 35% affirmation on women representation in political participation, Nigeria is still not there as women are grossly underrepresented in both appointive and elective political positions but in terms of administrations, it seems better because, particularly for head of, administrations, organisations, commissions among others, women are there representing because of their level of education but in elective positions, they are side-lined in Nigeria political system.

She expressed further that;

'in my personal experience, having found myself in a male dominated occupation, to the best of my ability, I have been devoted to my work, committed and diligent in my services to the University and which has made me to always be considered favourably amidst my male counterparts . In terms of positions within the University, I have not be found wanting particularly, in the recent elective positions, where I contested for the post of Provost, Post Graduate College here in this University, I eventually had the expected support despite the fact that, the electorates were dominated by males, I got almost 95% votes in a male dominated environment. I can personally say that, getting elective positions in the University where I work, I am favoured''. I also believed that, if women can present themselves as being worthy and capable, they should be considered.

Another respondent, a female senior lecturer, in the Department of Political Science in Ekiti State University

She observed based on the similar questions where she also corroborated the opinion of the professor of sociology though in a divergent view that, there is reality in gender inequality in Nigeria political participation. In her observation, she illumines the tactical ways by which women are being excluded in active participation in particularly in Nigeria politics. Citing examples of money politics in Nigeria electioneering process like the case of nomination forms by notable Political Parties e.g, APC and PDP in the 2023 general election. The price of nomination forms were exorbitant to a level of unbearable for women. Imagine as she said,

'' how can a women bring out 100m just for APC Presidential nomination form for a position she was not sure of the victory plus campaign mobilisation, security, logistics, mobilisation of delegates for primary election and general election proper with the nature of politics and the vote-buying tactics to win election in Nigeria becomes a hard-shell for any woman politician to take such risk in Nigeria political system''

In her extensive analysis, she said further that, how many women who are politically inclined and interested in politics can afford such financial responsibility to play active role in political participation, contest and win election in Nigeria, is serious factor among others. She emphasised that, women are actually underrepresented in political participation even in governance. For instance as she said, in the National Assembly from 1999 till date, the percentage of women representation is nothing to write home about as the percentage at each tenure of office has not gone beyond 6%, 7% and 11 %.respectively and it discourages women as no hope for them to meet the UN 35% affirmation for Women in Politics (Interview, July, 2024.)

The assertion above is also in line with the Author's data presentation above. In her elaborate observation, she said that, women issues generally is at a hopeless situation for the fact that, whenever women issues come up at the national Assembly, no one to push or speak on their behalf especially in terms of voting in favour, only few women are available to vote and since it's a game of numbers, it becomes a permanent stigma for women's participation in Nigeria Politics which result in premature recognition of a particular gender against another. As a scholar in academics, I don't really have personal political experience but from my empirical researches I can therefore understand the level of political marginalisation against women in our society and particularly in Nigeria Politics.

The responses of a female Professor, Department of Political Science, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko on her view on gender inequality on political participation in Nigeria.

In her definition she opined that, 'gender inequality simply means the discrimination on the basis of sex which is biological. This stereotype, no doubt, has affected the female gender as statistical data always reveals that women are underrepresented in decision-making as clearly shown in the membership of the 10th National Assembly: 3 women are in the Senate (2.7% of 109 Senators) and 14 women are in the House of Representatives (4.7% of 360 members). Women account for less than 5% of our federal legislators. The author was made to understand that, there is no doubt that women have a weak voice at the highest level of decision making in the country. This is not really surprising. It is a reflection of the suppression of women in their private lives which also manifests in our public space. Contrary to the culture which dictates that women are only fit for domestic activities, she said further that, the fact that some women have broken the glass ceiling in different sectors is evidence that women have the capacity to bring about development like their male counterparts. The fierce protest against the attempt to stop the recently enacted Gender Bill in Nigeria was an indication of women's resolve to rise against unfair treatment on the basis of gender, (Interview with Professor of Political Science, AAUA, 2024).

Equally, she totally agree with the submission that women are underrepresented in appointive and elective positions. In her response, she said as quoted,

'' I provided the statistical data for the 10th National Assembly earlier. Women have just 17 seats out of a total of 469 in our National Assembly. Hence, there is gender imbalance at the Federal legislature. Can a male dominant parliament make laws that are fair to the female gender''?

At the state level, no woman was voted to the exalted office of Executive Governor in any state in Nigeria. The list of ministers that was released on Thursday July 27, 2023 included only 7 women. This is less than the 35% Affirmative Action prescribed by International Organisations. Thus, socio-economic and political inclusiveness that will accommodate women in governance is far from being achieved. This further in her statement, worsens our national challenges regarding insecurity, poverty, health inequalities and political crises. Women account for a large percentage of our population so it is unfair to discriminate against them. The prevention of women from effective participation in our development initiatives is an underutilization of available talents.

In the same vain, in her response to personal experience where she said as quoted, '

''As a gender activist, I have had countless encounters with women that have been denied their political rights by the male gender. However, in the university community, things are a bit different. Female academics always speak out. Nevertheless, we still have a long way to go too. Only few women have had the opportunity to serve

as Vice-Chancellors in Nigerian universities. Women have the intellectual capacity for positive change in our country''.

Female citizens have the administrative competence required to make development happen in all spheres of the society. Let us rise and cause the change we hope for. (Interview, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, 2024)

DISCUSSION

In the findings, there are nebulous challenges of women's participation in politics. The approaches are hydra-headed and as result becomes a thorny case to be solved in Nigeria political atmospheres. The researches reveal some salient issues as obstacles against the fulfilment of UN 35% affirmation for women participation in politics. Some of the under listed points may be responsible for the acute poor recognitions and political marginalization of Nigerian women. In the findings, the points ranging from;

Gender Inequality: This is the most sensitive and appalling of all the barriers against women activities in the society. It refers to men being placed over women in all ramifications. The political atmospheres are ruled and dominated by men over women, which in turn has given rise to women being looked upon as mere appendage to men, as household wives and non-partisans in decision making process. Looking at gender inequality from patriarchal theory, three major features are discernable in the patriarchal society; there are existence of male kinship; permanent marriage and paternal authority. (Jenks, 19000) it has been argued however, that it may not be totally correct that the patriarchal society constitute the basis for the emergence of a state

Socio-Political Stigma: Women particularly in Africa countries are being stigmatised with the nature of African politics and Nigeria perspectives is the mentality and the insinuations of many people that, most of the women in political positions and whose their husbands are non-politicians are being influenced by men politicians who engage some of them in extra- marital affairs, and that its only who does not have husband or not under the authority of husband have total and absolute freedom for active political involvement which is in line with the likely issues in domestic affairs.

Election Funding: Nigeria electoral system and election have taken a new dimension where politics is capital intensive which requires huge financial backup to contest and win election. Most women politicians in Nigeria who seek these positions could not afford such financial obligations therein, despite the wavers giving to women aspirants by some of the political parties, even few of them that are wealthy to the task could not sacrifice or take risk as men politicians

Political Violence: Violence is a bane of political participation in Nigerian. Elections are always been characterized by one form of violence or the other since Nigeria gained independence. For instance, look at 1964 general election crisis, 1962 Action Group Crisis, 1983 general election, and even in the fourth republic, all the election conducted have dropped lives of many people. Women did not have lion hearth like men and get discouraged for active participation in a critical political environment.

Religious and Cultural barriers: It's in the recent time the women Christians are accorded much responsibility in the church like pastors, deaconess and other important roles but the Islam do not accord women much responsibility in public activities that concerns both men and women, 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.

CONCLUSION

Women in Nigerian politics has generated controversies and unbridled agitation for increase in women's participation in particularly Nigeria. Despite the tremendous effort by both government and non-governmental organizations to meet up with the declaration made at the fourth World Conference on women in Beijing, which advocated 30% affirmative action and National Gender Policy (NGP) recommendation of 35% affirmative action for a more inclusive representation of women in both elective and appointive positions. It is retrogressive, that Nigerian women have not gone beyond 11% since independence. About 7 tenures of

different administrations in the fourth republic, the data above shows that, women's representation in Nigeria political participation is plummeted against the expected percentage for women in Nigeria Politics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The political atmosphere and the manner by which politics is played in the world particularly in African countries and Nigeria perspectives, with the nature of genders inequality in all ramifications, it is becoming clearer that, it will be a hard-shell for women to achieve the 30% affirmative in line with Beijing and UN declarations, except the following recommendations are put into considerations.

- In order to balance the representation at all levels of government, quota system should be introduced and relevant stakeholders such as Independent National Electoral Commission and political parties should also be engaged to ensure strict adherence to the issue of 35% at all levels.
- In order to avoid inability of some women to contest and loose certain positions, certain specific positions both in elective and appointive should be reserved only for women and also be incorporated into Political Parties constitutions and ratified by INEC and the Federal Government.
- The issue of unaffordable nomination forms by some political parties eg, APC (100m) and PDP (50m) in the last primary election is one of the banes of women's financial capacity to contest such election. Although, women were given free ticket or subsidised rate but winning election goes beyond free form at the primary level. Therefore, other factors should be considered for common people to partake.
- INEC should reform political party primaries in such a way that, it will not involve the usual numbers of delegates to win election and more sensitively, the vote buying at the primary level with huge amount of money/dollars like what played out in the last elections has automatically discouraged average politicians particularly women to partake in the primary elections in Nigeria.

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Interview

1. Interview with a female Professor, Department of Sociology, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti
2. Interview with a female Professor, Department of Political Science, Adekunle Ajadsin University, Akungba Akoko. Ondo State, June, 2024.
3. Interview with a female Senior Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti, June, 2024.
4. Interview with a female Honourable member, Ondo State House of Assembly, Owo constituency 1, Owo Local Government, June, 2024.
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6. Interview with a female Honourable member, Ekiti State House of Assembly, Ikole Constituency II, June, 2024.
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