



Gender Equality and the Challenges of Political Participation in Nigeria, 1999-2019: Drawing Lessons for Gender Balance in 2023 Election in Nigeria.

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Abstract

Gender equality and political participation are widely contested issues among scholars worldwide, particularly those in Nigeria. Gender mainstreaming has become a global practice in national policies across the globe. This study investigated factors that prevented women's active political engagement in Nigeria between 1999 and 2019 and explored practical ways through which political parties in Nigeria can promote gender equality in the 2023 elections. The paper is ex-post facto research and adopted a content analysis method based on secondary data from journals, government publications and textbooks. The study revealed the factors that hampered women's participation in Nigerian politics, such as a lack of funds, party marginalization within parties, and political violence. The paper recommended that money politics be discouraged in Nigerian politics and that political parties ensure compliance with party rules and regulations governing campaign conduct in order to dissuade candidates from using violent means during campaigns and elections.

Keywords: Gender equality, political participation, election and women representation.

Introduction

Gender equality and political participation are contested issues among scholars globally and in Nigeria. It has become a global practice to mainstream gender in policies of the nations. It is worth noting that gender balance in political participation and elections is vital for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Regrettably, it is self-evident that Nigeria has few women in elected positions following 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 elections. Although Nigeria rectified the visible Gender-Based 'Affirmative Action' as it was introduced in Nigeria in the year 2000 and improved in the 2006 National Gender Policy. In accordance with the 1995 Beijing Declaration, Nigeria's adoption of the National Policy of 35 % Affirmative Action for women is

one of the several initiatives made to empower women in politics. However, in the 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019 elections, Nigeria was nowhere near the international goal of 35 % voter turnout. The underrepresentation of women in politics doubts Nigeria's democratic credentials, as democracy depends on the values of liberty, equality, and full involvement of all citizens in government operations. The country's national average of women's political engagement has maintained at 6.7% in elected and appointive offices, which is much lower than the global average of 22.5%, the African regional average of 23.4%, and the West African sub regional average of 15%. (Oloyede, 2016). The more Nigerian women want political participation, the less democratic their participation possibilities

appear (Quadri, 2015). Thus, politics in Nigeria continues to be dominated by men (Okeke, 2015; Olurode, 2013). Women's engagement in politics falls short of the 30 % required by international norms and the 35 % mandated by the 2006 National Gender Policy. Participation of women in politics and the number of women in elected and appointed political posts is increasing at a relatively modest rate despite efforts to alter this reality in Nigeria.

Political parties must be involved in making progress on gender equality in political systems as they establish frameworks for political participation, develop policies, and choose candidates for political office. The experience demonstrates that transition periods provide an opportunity to overcome previous inequities by adopting and implementing measures that promote a more significant role for women in politics. United Nations (2013) states that an inclusive democratic transition must address fundamental rights and liberties, political engagement, and socio-economic development. All three are necessary for effective government. When women participate ultimately and on an equal basis with men in political life, this is a sign of true democracy - one in which both men and women wield the authority granted by the people. From the preceding, this paper investigates: (i) what reasons prevented women's active political engagement in Nigeria between 1999 and 2019? (ii) What are the practical ways political parties in Nigeria promote gender equality in the 2023 elections?

Contextual explanation of the key concepts

Gender equality

According to United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (2017), gender equality refers to equal conditions, treatment, and opportunities for women and men, girls and boys to realize their full potential, human rights, and dignity, and contribute to (and benefit from) economic, social, cultural, and political growth. Therefore, gender equality is the valuation by a society of the similarities and differences between men and women and their community and society. Equality does not mean that women and men will become identical but that their rights, duties, and opportunities will not rely on

their gender at birth. In addition (UNICEF, 2017) stated that gender equality implies that the interests, needs, and priorities of both women and men, as well as girls and boys, are taken into account, recognizing the diversity of different groups and that all humans are free to develop their abilities and make decisions without being constrained by gender-based stereotypes and prejudices. Gender equality is a subject of human rights and is regarded as a prerequisite for and indicator of people-centred sustainable development. Gender is rooted in culture more than biology.

Gender equality, political participation and sustainable development.

According to Dim & Asomah, (2019), gender often sets the expectations of both males and females and what each group can and cannot accomplish based on cultural and religious norms, which frequently inform legal, and legislative instruments deemed discriminatory towards female counterparts. According to Kasomo, (2012, p. 57), gender is not just about roles but also about relationships. Who established the regulations, and for what purposes are they related to what people claim women and men are or should do? In most nations today, men continue to dominate the political sphere. They frequently determine the rules of the game—laws, regulations, decrees, and policies—in order to advance their interests over those of women. Women initially fought to get voting rights and the right to run for political office. Their male counterparts did not experience such restrictions in most countries, including Athens, where the notion and practice of democracy first arose (Kasa, 2015). Gender equality, according to Idike et al., (2020), emphasizes the examples of widespread and deeply established prejudice against women. In the past few decades, the majority of interest in gender relations has been driven by feminism, notwithstanding the general use of the term gender. Most feminists have portrayed gender relations as inequity and servitude (Sarker, 2006; Waylen, 1996). However, gender is not merely the two-fold categorization of the social world as it is sometimes persuaded to be (Connell, 1985; Millett, 1970). It is a cultural category supported by socially constructed (and contested) attitudes

and rules regarding sexuality and identity. In contemporary society, these beliefs and norms, like the women, only belong to the kitchen, childbearing and rearing. At the same time, men are superior to women, make decisions, are visible in specific ideas and practise that guide (and constrain) human activities and how individual actors may project their identities take hold of opportunities and experience well-being in life (Arsel et al., 2015). Also, Quadri (N.D.) asserts that pursuing women's development goals can only be meaningful and realistic if women hold positions of responsibility that provide them with the authority to negotiate and influence policies tailored toward the goals. In Nigeria, the absence of political authority impedes the advancement of women. Lawson-Remer (2012) stated that evidence suggests that expanding social and economic possibilities and political representation for women has ripple effects on the health, education, and socio-economic results of the entire society and the next generation.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on feminist thought. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* marked the beginning of feminist theory in the early-to-mid 18th century (1792). Mary Wollstonecraft was not concerned with the equality of men and women per se. Still, she did believe that women have a more extensive function in society than simply maintaining the household. According to Chandrika (2019), Feminist theory aims to understand the nature of gender inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations and sexuality. In the same way, a feminist analysis in the political arena aims to eliminate prejudice against women and extend the political dialogue. In reality, feminist philosophy has always been about shedding light on the processes that create and maintain inequality, oppression, and injustice and encouraging the pursuit of equality and justice (Crossman, 2021). Mary Wollstonecraft, Martha Nussbaum, Susan Moller Okin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Angela Davis, and Nancy Fraser are notable feminists. Contemporary liberal feminist seeks to reform the legal and political system so that women can access opportunities and produce a state of equality between men and women

(Sindhuja & Murugan, 2001). Therefore, this paper adopted liberal feminist theory in analyzing the challenges of women's participation in the electoral competition in Nigeria, as the theory can explain the origins of socio-political, socio-economic, socio-cultural, and even psychological factors that prevent women from participating effectively in electoral competition in Nigeria. Also, Liberal feminist theory has been applied in the study to seek the strategy on legal reforms and practical ways through which political parties in Nigeria can promote gender equality in elections.

Methods

The study adopted an ex-post factor research design to explore past events and understand current happenings. It also explores the relationship between variables in a study which had already occurred without determining the causality.

Data collection

The data for the study were generated from secondary sources such as textbooks, official publications, conference papers, international databases, official documentaries and internet sources.

Data analysis

The data for the study were analyzed qualitatively using content analysis techniques and logical deductive reasoning using historical and interpretative methods.

The presentation of the political participation of women in Nigerian past elections between 1999-2019 is presented below.

Table 1.1 showing the past and present statistics of women representations in Nigeria past elections 1999-2019.

Offices	1999		2003		2007		2011		2015		2019	
Office	Seat Available	Women	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	1	0
Senate president	109	3(2.8%)	109	4(3.7%)	109	9(8.3)	109	7(6.4%)	109	8(7.33%)	109	7(6.42%)
House of Reps	360	12(3.3%)	360	21(5.8%)	360	25(6.9%)	360	26(7.2%)	360	14(3.8%)	360	11(3.05%)
Governors	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0
State house of Assembly	990	24(2.4%)	990	40(4.04%)	990	57(.8%)	990	68(6.9%)	990	-	990	-
State House of Assembly Committee	829	18(2.2%)	881	32(3.6%)	887	52(5.9%)	887	-	887	-	887	-
LGA Chairperson	710	13(1.8%)	774	15(1.9%)	740	27(3.6%)	740	-	740	-	740	-
Councilors	6366	69(1.1%)	6368	267(4.2%)	6366	235(3.7%)	6368	-	668	-	668	-

Source: INEC, 2019 Abuja.

Table 1.2 Female Members of the Nigerian National Assembly 1999-2019

Year	Senate	House of Representatives
1999	3 (2.8%)	12 (3.3%)
2003	4 (3.7%)	21 (5.8%)
2007	9 (8.3%)	26 (7.2%)
2011	7(6.4%)	25 (6.9%)
2015	8 (7%)	19 (5.2%)
2019	7 (6.4%)	23 (6%)

Source: www.inecnigeria.org, updated by the author

The table 1.1 and 1.2 indicate when Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999-2019. The tables above illustrate the historical and current realities of women's representation in Nigeria during the 1999-2019 elections. It indicates that there has been no significant rise in the number of women in the Nigerian National Assembly and House of Representatives. In 1999, there were three (3) (2.8%) female Senators and twelve (12) (3.3%) female Representatives in the National Assembly. In 2003, four (4) (3.7 %) and twenty-one (21) (5.8 %) women were elected to the Assembly, respectively. In 2007, there were nine (9) (8.3%) female Senators and twenty-six (26) (7.2 %) female Representatives in the National Assembly. In 2011, there were seven (7) (6.4%) women in the National Assembly and twenty-five (25) (6.9%) in the House of Representatives. In 2015, there were seven (7) (6.4%) women in the Senate and nineteen (19) (5.2 %) in the House of Representatives. While in 2019, there were 8 (7%) female senators and 23 (6%) female

representatives in the House of Representatives. The number of women elected to the Nigerian Senate decreased from seven to six between 2015 and 2019. In addition, Ogunyika, (2019) reported that as of 2019, only 3.8% of the Nigerian National Assembly members are women, the lowest rate for women's legislative participation in sub-Saharan Africa and well below the regional average of 24%. In 2019, only 3.8% of Nigeria's National Assembly members were women, the lowest rate for women's legislative participation in sub-Saharan Africa and considerably below the region's average of 24%. It is crucial to note that when President Buhari succeeded President Jonathan in 2015, only six (17%) of his 36-member cabinet were women. However, 13 (32.5%) women were in his predecessor's team of 40 members (Akutu & Opara, 2015). In 2019, with President Buhari's re-election, his cabinet consisted of 42 members, of which just seven (17 per cent) were women (Williams, 2019).

Table 1.3: Trends of Women Deputy Governors in Nigeria Election Year 1999-2019

Election Year	No. of Women Deputy Governors
1999	1
2003	2
2007	6
2011	1
2015	6
2019	4

Source: INEC, 2019 Abuja

From table 1.3, the number of women elected as Deputy Governors for 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011, 2015 and 2019 were 1, 2, 6, 1, 6 and 4, respectively. The total number of Deputy Governors was 36 in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011,

2015 and 2019. The statistics reveal that women's involvement in the 2019 election remains low. From statistics, the position of deputy governor in Nigeria in the 2019 election is currently held by four women in four Nigerian states: Enugu,

Kaduna, Ogun and Rivers. However, this figure was higher in 2015, when women were elected deputy governor in six states. This is a drop from the number of deputy governors elected in the 2015 elections. From the present statistics, we might see that women's engagement in politics nonetheless falls short of the required 30 per cent by international standards and 35 per cent asset in the National Gender Policy 2006 (INEC, 2019 Abuja). The search for improved gender equality in political involvement in Nigeria is not promising; women have an incredible potential if the initial barrier can be broken, enabling women's admission into politics. Women form approximately half of the population nationally and have a tremendous ability to mobilize and be empowered, beginning from the grassroots level with capacity building and empowerment as a combined effort by the women and the government. However, from the above stated, it is self-evident that Nigeria did not have any meaningful influence in the realization of gender balance in its elected offices and appointments in the 2019 elections. This becomes a significant concern in this paper so that it can explore the current realities regarding gender balance in Nigeria's elective positions and appointments, what were the barriers to women's political participation in the 1999- 2019 Nigerian elections, and the practical ways that would promote gender equality in the 2023 elections in Nigeria.

Factors Militating against Women's Participation in Nigerian Politics

Several factors have been proven to stand in the way of women, thereby preventing them from active participation in politics, especially in the African/Nigerian context. Some of these include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Structural

There is a direct link between the social and economic status of women in society and their participation in political institutions and elected bodies Delys(2014). Socio-economic obstacles include poverty cum lack of adequate financial resources

1a. Lack of Finance

Discussing politics in any part of the world is impossible without addressing the financial aspect. Active engagement in global politics, including Nigerian politics, is contingent upon a financial commitment. Esidene and Abdul (2013) state that the dominant philosophy in Nigerian politics is money. The money factor plays a crucial role in the conception, mobilization, and winning of political offices, whether at the presidential, governorship, senatorial, local council elections or even age-grade meetings. Izomo and Oguigo (2020) say that money is essential at all stages of the electoral process's development in order to pay the campaign staff and keep them engaged. The low economic standing of women, particularly in Nigeria, is the primary reason inhibiting their active engagement in politics. In Nigeria, the number of women occupying elective positions would continue to drop as most of them cannot afford the financial costs of facilitating their election. Thus, access to financial resources facilitates women's active political participation, particularly if they intend to run for office. Thus, in Nigeria, the more one's financial might, the greater one's chances of attaining public office. Therefore, money is a crucial element in party primaries, as it entices officials and motivates voters to favour particular candidates. Since male applicants have, on average, more money than female aspirants, many women are excluded because they cannot compete financially with their male rivals. (Ibrahim & Salihu 2004, p 10) captures this pattern as Naira for Naira. It becomes increasingly difficult for women to acquire party leadership posts. According to Tor and Terkula (2011), the corrupt system that has entered the Nigerian system has placed women on edge, and everything appears to be working against them (women) in favour of men. The majority of women appear to have little or no financial support. According to Nwankwo and Nkereuwen (2020), the cost of the nomination form is typically the first obstacle confronting women candidates. For instance, the APC and PDP have set the cost of presidential nomination and interest forms at N45 million (\$125,000) and N12 million (\$33,000), respectively. However, in the 2019 election cycle, both parties gave women candidates a discount. The APC offered a 50 %

general discount for female candidates, whilst the PDP issued a more generous discount, decreasing its nomination forms by 100 per cent for female candidates, leaving them with a significantly reduced fee for expressing interest.

1b. marginalization within parties

According to Okoosi-Simbine (2012), marginalization within parties is a consequence of the chauvinistic politics that predominate in the country, as it does in many other African nations. The parties recruit candidates, seeking individuals with a good chance of being elected due to their personal qualities, background, and overall competence. According to International Institute for Democracy and Electoral (2021), Political parties are deeply patriarchal, male-dominated entities that have been slow to transform. The above limits women's ability to enjoy the opportunities and benefits of citizenship as men on an equal footing in the political domain. Okoosi-Simbine (2012) observed that there are a few women in key electoral governance institutions. They play a secondary role in party caucuses and strategic meetings and are not prominent in party primaries. The problem at the party level in Nigeria originates from the fact that women are not participating at the executive level, nominated or supported for influential positions in the parties—positions that would provide them with significant political experience (Okoosi-Simbine, 2003a). However, women make up the majority of voters in elections and have a significant presence at campaign meetings and rallies as supporters and entertainers. They are rarely card-carrying or registered party members, marginalizing them in elective and appointee positions. According to Onyeji (2019), the party primaries demonstrated that women were not given an equal playing field, particularly in the main parties, resulting in fewer women emerging as party candidates. At the core of gender equality, political involvement, and national growth in Nigeria, is the legacy of an ideology-free party system, weak institutions, dysfunctional elites, poverty, insecurity, and unemployment.

2. Cultural

According to International Institute for Democracy and Electoral (2021), culturally, there

is a belief that women are supposed to be led but not to lead. Traditional attitudes towards gender equality influence women's advancement in political participation. The current political culture often has traditional attitudes regarding women in decision-making roles.

2a. Religion/Cultural Belief System

Like other African countries, Nigeria is a patriarchal society with strong cultural and religious influences on women's political participation. Like many other African nations, most Nigerian societies prohibit women from participating in active politics due to religious beliefs. Politics is viewed as a dirty game and sacrilegious in this region of the world; therefore, it has the potential to defile any spiritual person who is aware of eternity, given that there is life after death. However, politics in poor cultures are rife with strange practises, such as vote-buying, ballot box stuffing, arson, the assassination of political opponents, and violence. Therefore, it is a poor practice for a devotee of God to engage in criminal activity. It becomes crucial to discourage individuals or organizations from engaging in cyclical politics. According to Agbalajobi (2010), winning public elections in Nigeria requires force or "do-or-die" decisions, and those with the physical stamina and strength to use brute force are men. Therefore, women would have to make room for men to seize by force whatever was available. However, the moment has come for this local belief system to make way for internationally accepted practices.

3. Institutional

The uses of gender quotas or proportional representation electoral systems are examples of compensation to institutional barriers that prevent fair competition (Delys;2014). Institutional barriers are considered the first cause in explaining systematic differences in women's representation across relatively similar types of society.

3a. Absence of Effective means of Affirmative Action implementation

According to Agbalajobi (2010), Affirmative Action is typically an anti-discrimination measure. It is a broad phrase that encompasses a variety of measures designed to assist vulnerable

groups in society, particularly women. These policies employ purposeful efforts to eliminate discrimination. According to her, a policy process of this type permits the creation of laws to promote equal opportunity for individuals and the betterment of the status of underprivileged groups. The United Nations General Assembly enacted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1979 (United Nations & Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs 1985). On this note, Agbalajobi (2010) argues that the treaty has been appropriately described as the particular article of gender empowerment and the International Bill of Rights for Women. Since its adoption, the Convention has become a point of reference in the quest for women's equality in the socio-political scheme. The calling for equal rights for women regardless of their social level in nearly every element of life, this call essentially reflects the degree of neglect of the fundamental rights of women resulting from biological disparities. Adoption by states parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the present Convention but shall not result in the maintenance of separate or unequal standards; these measures shall be discontinued when the goals of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved (Article IV, CEDAN). However, it is instructive to observe that the formulations of the Affirmative Action standards are not the obstacle to eliminating gender bias. Implementing the policy remains a concern, and as a result, prejudice against women in politics continues to exist.

4. Political Violence

Since Nigeria's restoration to civil rule, multiparty politics, and elections between 1999 and 2019, political and electoral violence have characterized the democratic process. According to Sani & Muhammed (2012), In 2011, during the April presidential elections, violence erupted in Bauchi State, resulting in the deaths of nine National Youth Service Corps volunteers. Despite the fact that such violence affects freedom of assembly and electoral outcomes, which affects all citizens, it likely has a more significant effect on already cautious women.

According to Ontario (2005, p. 94), parties and individuals capable of using violence perform better in elections in Kenya. As a result, the electorate has been conditioned to perceive electioneering violence as inevitable. This attitude discourages opposition parties and individuals, particularly women, from participating in the political process and is most prevalent among members of the ruling party. Fear, anxiety, impending crises, and violence were pervasive in the political climate preceding the election. In anticipation of significant election-related violence, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All-People's Congress (APC) signed the "Abuja Accord", which called for a peaceful election and the appropriate administration of the outcome (Safir & Alam, 2015). Also, Quadri, M.O. (nd) felt that all indications pointed to an oncoming crisis. The significance of this for women was that they consciously and deliberately avoided electioneering and remained in the background of the process, allowing ample room for males to conduct the business of politics. This leads to apathy and predictable election outcomes that may not necessarily reflect voter preferences.

The practical ways to promote gender equality in the 2023 elections in Nigeria comprise: preventing the reoccurrence of the above challenges in the 2023 Nigerian elections.

Addressing these obstacles requires more than simply encouraging women to run for public office; it requires a fundamental shift in the culture of political parties, building support among male politicians for gender equality and women's right to participate in politics, and constructing broad-based coalitions for gender equality. Effective training and lobbying in this field involve a comprehensive understanding of the background, including internal party policies and legislation, candidate recruiting and nomination procedures, and campaign financing protocols. Another developing lesson is the necessity for long-term support, including developing women's political capacities and providing chances for a political apprenticeship before and after electoral campaigns.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, the participation of women in Nigerian politics and the number of women in political positions, both elective and appointed, is expanding at a prolonged rate regardless of efforts to change this existing trend in recent times. Findings from the study revealed the factors that hampered women's participation in Nigerian politics; structural such as a lack of funds, party marginalisation within parties, cultural/religious belief systems and institutional-like absence of effective means of affirmative action implementation and political violence. This has made Politics in Nigeria to remain predominantly a male affair. However, the moment has arrived for this cultural/religious belief system to make way for internationally acceptable practices. A mental shift should permit women to participate in politics in a healthy, competitive climate free of violence, undue intimidation, and harassment.

Recommendations

- Policies on economic and social empowerment are needed to strengthen women to participate on an equal footing with men in political participation.
- Women should be economically empowered through support from international donors that goes beyond sensitization on the necessity for active political engagement to include financially supporting women aspirants throughout campaigns, including campaign materials, etc.
- Political parties should be required to set aside quotas for female candidates. Political parties should implement the recommended 35 per cent affirmative action strategy to ensure that at least 35 per cent of female candidates appear on their primary and final candidate lists.
- Money politics should be avoided in Nigerian politics, and women who choose to participate actively in politics should be encouraged to do so without fear or favour.
- Typically, NGOs do more sensitization on gender balance before elections. Still, for such efforts to have a significant impact, continuous sensitization remains one of the best strategies to raise the number of active women aspirants and participation.
- Women should translate their numerical strength into a strength by joining political parties to feel their influence, as political parties provide the basis for active political participation.
- The government should tighten the legal framework so that female politicians in Nigeria can contest any electoral fraud.
- Political parties should comply with party rules and laws governing campaign conduct to dissuade candidates from employing violent tactics during campaigns and elections.

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