

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA (1999 – 2023)

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Abstract

Women make up over fifty percent of the population of Nigeria with huge socio-economic contributions, yet politically the women are largely marginalised as they are visibly seen occupying less important political positions. The paper interrogated the participation of women in the political landscape of Nigeria within the democratic dispensation of the Fourth Republic. A qualitative research, it employed the historical descriptive method of data collection and analysis, leaning on the feminist theory as the basis of analysis of the interplay between the struggle for power and the implication on the female folk in the country. Among others, the research found out that women are critical stakeholders in the Nigerian State yet several factors such as economics, the nature of politics, cultural practices and other socio-political factors shut the women out of political prominence. This results in women occupying very few positions, and is not able to clinch some exalted offices in the land. It recommended that the Nigerian government should implement the 30 and 35 per cent international affirmative action and the national gender policy on women; there is a need for the institutionalisation of a functional endowment fund to help the women bankroll the expensive nature of the political processes in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Politics, political participation, democracy, marginalisation and governance*

Introduction

Politics is unarguably an indispensable tradition in the organisation of state affairs. The centrality of politics to human affairs has led to a plethora of views by scholars. Jean Bodin, the French political philosopher who gave Political Science its name, 'Science Politique', had simply opined that politics is the organisation of the state as well as the instruments that gives effect to its existence (Eminue, 2005).

Harold Laswell gave a classical meaning of politics when he explained politics to centre around, "who gets what, when and how". Some years later, David Easton saw *politics* as the set of interactions by which values are authoritatively allocated for a society (Shively, 1997). Our conception of politics and political participation centres on the views of these three scholars, as they bring to the fore some critical issues about politics. This can be summarised into:

1. Politics is the core of arranging and organising the state, setting up the enter structures, institutions and important rules to regulate the State.
2. It determines the way scarce state resources that have alternative applications e.g., money, lands, rivers etc, are apportioned amongst units, groups, individuals etc.
3. Politics decides how public goods: infrastructures, schools, airports, medical facilities, blocks and public service positions among others are shared using set out criteria.
4. Politics determines why and who makes important decisions as to what happens or does not happen in the State.
5. It determines who is to be included and excluded in important arrangements in the State and why such may be so.
6. Politics decides what laws to be made, how to make them, who to make them, when to make them, as well as when to repeal such laws when need be.

The importance of politics and political participation especially in the democratic milieu is underscored in (i) – (vi) above. Given that politics is, as important as is seen above, the approach to politics which ensures the above such that it becomes inclusive is even more important. It is in this regard, that Pogoson (2014) noted that democracy is the most important instrument at the disposal of nation-states in the business of realising sustainable development while politics continues to remain an engine for managing human affairs in society. If politics and democracy are this central in human affairs, the Inter-parliamentary Union-IPU (1997) notes that to achieve democracy, will need a genuine collaboration or partnership between male and female folks. According to IPU, it is only when the males and females are treated as equals and bestowed with unfettered access/and opportunity in the conduct of affairs especially as equals in a way that there is 'complementary' that democracy is achievable.

Pogoson (2014) corroborated IPU's position as the scholar avers that participation is central and

fundamental to democracy. The scholar notes that the key role of citizens in a democracy is the capacity to take part in public life. Participation itself relates to the extent to which members of a community partake in community life. The centrality of participation in democratic governance is evident in the running of the city-state of Athens where allegedly democracy debuted.

However, it is noticeable that the issue of participation in a democracy is largely discriminatory from the Greek period to Nigeria's experience especially as it regards women. Pogoson (2014) has noted rightly that for centuries, the discussion of democracy and political participation, freedom and equality and rights of men and leadership roles has been conducted in a way that rather suggests that women are not important. It is unarguable that women have been kept outside the domain of politics especially as it relates to occupying important offices and positions. Political thinkers, such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau considered women only for domestic roles. In the Greek city-state of Athens, women were part of those who were excluded alongside slaves, aliens and children from what goes on at the Polis. In Nigeria our former President, Major-General Muhammadu Buhari had comically noted that women are meant for the "other room", a pejorative for that women were only important in private spheres as sex instruments and domestic hands not fit for public positions.

Statement of Problem

The level of women participation and leadership positions in Nigeria when compared to their male counterpart is generally low, insignificant and unattractive. This is viewed from the fact that women are equal stakeholders in Nigeria's democracy and the fact that women make up half the population of the country, and again more than fifty-one per cent of them get involved in voting during elections (Eke, 2022).

Notwithstanding the role performed by women in society and their population, women are grossly underrepresented in elective and appointive positions in Nigeria. In spite of their

roles, participation in politics is still a paltry 6.7 per cent, miles away from the global average which is 22.5%, below Africa's regional average of 23.4 per cent and also way down from West Africa's average of 15 per cent (Eke, 2022). According to Ewepu (2021), only seven women made Muhammadu Buhari's 36 ministerial appointments, and in the 9th National Assembly, out of a total of 469 members, only 29 were women. The participation of women in politics as well as women occupying exalted offices continues to be abysmally low. This is despite international and national policies. For instance, the Fourth World Conference in Beijing China in 1995 advocated 30 per cent affirmative action, and the 2006 National Gender Policy of Nigeria advocated 35 per cent women participation in both elective and appointive positions (Edidem, 2019).

Several factors have been advanced to explain women's under-representation in politics in Nigeria. Edidem (2019) attributes women under-representation to male chauvinism and other cultural practices, while Eke (2022) attributes the miserly female participation in politics and leadership positions to the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society.

Whatever the cause, the bottom line is that women's representation has been abysmally low even in the first Republic. As Omotola (2007) avers, only four female legislators were elected in the whole of Nigeria during the first Republic, an insignificant figure to afford women any influence in playing any active role in the policy-making process.

According to Akiyode-Afolabi (2003), in 1999 out of the 11,881 elected positions in Nigeria only 181 (1.5 per cent) were women, out of 109 senators only 5 representing 4.6 per cent were females, out of 360 members of the House of Representatives only 13 representing 3.6 per cent were women; of the 36 Governors, none was a female, of the 990 seats in the various State Houses of Assembly, only 12 – 1.21 per cent were women, of the 774 Local Government Chairmen, only 9 were women while out of the 8700 Councilors in the country, only 143 were females.

The foregoing buttresses the fact of female under-representation in politics in Nigeria and

therefore forms a major concern which makes this research a worthy one within the central thesis that the near annihilation and exclusion of women in leadership positions is related largely to the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian Society and which is parallel to the tenets of democracy. The patriarchal nature of Nigerian society sees women as elements that should be led and used as catalysts but certainly be excluded from leadership roles.

Materials and Method

The paper is based on the qualitative approach of research. The historical/descriptive techniques were used in generating data. Data were sourced from documentary instruments. In other words, the research relied on secondary data. Efforts were made to collect data regarding female representation in Nigeria in both elective and appointive positions. These data were derived from INEC, National Bureau of Statistics documents, unpublished materials, internet sources as well as materials from related sources.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Feminist theory is the preferred theoretical framework for the analysis of this research as it captures and explains the subject matter better. Feminist theories are domesticated from International Relations. It is unarguable to aver that feminist theories in the analysis of domestic political situations were adapted from the international scene. Jacqui (2001) noted that beginning from the early 1980s feminist IR scholars have offered intriguing perceptions on global Politics. According to Jacqui (2001), the thrust of the argument of feminism is the challenge to the traditional masculinity inherent in global politics. Scholars of feminist persuasion bemoan inequality and unfair treatment to the female folk notwithstanding their contributions to society. From whatever dimension, feminism aims at two things. The first is to understand gender inequality. In doing this, their focus is on gender politics, power relations and sexuality. The second objective is the advancement of the rights of women and general interest through a critique of social and political relations (Fatile et al., 2012).

According to Eke (2022), one thing that is presents in society and can shape structures and set current power relations are the gender–power order. To a large extent, there is a confluence of opinion by feminists that different benefits, rewards and burdens are vested or endowed on people according to the sex one is given at birth, which is a mere accident not chosen by anyone (Zalewski, 2000). Bryson (2003) notes that a fundamental aspect of the feminist movement is to question the reasons that make men have more power and privileges than women as well as how such can be changed.

The core of the present research is to unravel the reasons behind low women representation in politics in Nigeria and hence leadership roles. For proper understanding, the paper borrows an insight from a feminist theorist who opines that low woman political participation is a function of the interplay of society's structures, actors and institutions. According to this scholar, the work of actors is found within fixed structures, where the institution and structures are also creations of actors (Awofeso & Odeyemi,2014).

For the avoidance of doubt, Tickner (2020) avers that two structures in society impact gender with great influences on women's representation: socio-economic structure and culture. In terms of socio-economic structure, two types are identified, traditional socio-economic structure and modernised socio-economic structure. While the former gender roles are more obvious, the latter gender roles are less pronounced. Culture also influences women's participation in politics especially in the traditional socio-economic environments where Nigeria tends to lean more to.

Literature Review

Democracy

One form of government that has acquired popularity in the globalised world is democracy, to the extent that every polity lay claim to it. It has become the current that sweeps the world so much that dictatorial and military government's lay claim to one variant of it or the other (Agara, 2024). For instance, Samuel Finer noted that even the military governments had come up with

official democratic designations for their juntas e.g., presidential democracy, basic democracy, guided democracy, organic democracy, selective democracy, neo-democracy, and other totalitarian one-party regimes naming their forms of governance as people's democracy (Finer, 1975).

The name given to it notwithstanding, two things are worthy of note in democracies: democracy is a form of political arrangement – a method by which government affairs are run; in a broader sense, democracy connotes a means of realising human relationships and the development of individual personalities (Agara, 2024). It is in the sense of realising the development of human personality that scholars see democracy in the light of the necessity for people's participation by every adult and directed at the process involved in how the values that regulate society are formed.

Democracy stands on several pillars but this paper will consider two which are in tandem with the gamut of this discussion. The first is the concept of equality. Nature hardly endows different persons with the same capacities and treasures and so equality in a democratic sense refers to equality of treatment of individuals, the rich and the poor, free-born and slaves, man and woman. It is to this extent that all individuals in the state are expected under the law to have equality (Agara, 2024). The second essential element of democracy is the notion of participation by members in the process by which a given society is administered. The quality of this element cannot be over-emphasised. Participation is not merely taking part in but in quality and equality of opportunity where this convokes the capacity of every member of the society notwithstanding the accident of gender the right of equal opportunity to hold whatever degree of public office.

Other ingredients by which democracy is consummated in the state are: the rule of law, independent, and impartial judiciary, periodic elections, independent and impartial electoral umpire, free press and freedom of expression

and judgement, among others. Democracy may not have the magic wand for sniffing off the challenges of society, yet the ideas and principle that drives it is superior and accepted as better than all other political formats. This is underscored in the implied principle that “no man or set of men is wise enough or good enough to rule others without their consent (Agara, 2024:5). This is predicated on the unarguable fact that the hallmark of democracy is about enriching the socio-economic and political conditions of man and driving human security in the society (Udoms & Ibiamu, 2012; Udoms et al., 2015; Pabon et al., 2024).

Political Participation

Political participation with a long history is a very important means of community life. Whether in totalitarian or democratic regimes, political participation comes in as a modality of community engagement in the affairs of the polity. It is to this extent that a confluence of explanations sees the subject matter of political participation to point to the process by which citizens get involved in the activities of their political system. Alapiki (2010) sees political participation as every unit of voluntary activity by which members of society get involved in the process of selecting those who rule them thereby gets involved in the process of public policy. This definition has several limitations. The one concerns the fact that political participation centres on a selection of political personnel. However, the definition given by Lawson & Wasburn (1969) is more comprehensive. The duo sees political participation in the light of the activities of individuals acting by themselves or through group activities aimed at influencing policy-making or changing power distribution and the principles of exercising it in a particular state or society.

From the above, it is apt to add that political participation is present in all manners of societies, large or small, totalitarian or democratic. However, political participation is only enlarged and becomes more colourful in

democratic regimes where expectedly, more and more people are involved in the decision-making processes through various levels of participation.

Discussion and Findings

1. Women, Democracy and Political Participation in Nigeria

Democratic governance on the pillars of party politics has become the best means the world over of gaining sustainable development. However, in the third-world states, as it is in Nigeria, politics has become an arena dominated by men and females reduced to insignificance. Pogoson (2014) has observed and advised that:

- a. advancing democratic governance requires the creation as well as maintenance of an environment of inclusion and responsive political processes.
- b. there is a need to embrace women's perspective on societal issues and as such an important pre-requisite for democratic development and governance rests on enhanced participation of women in political affairs.
- c. women have political rights which remain enviable in a democratic framework.

Nwabunkeonye (2014) and Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) (2018) are spirited in noting that women's political participation in Nigeria falls below global expectations. Nwabunkeonye, (2014) observed that women's political participation in Nigeria is less than proportional to their numeric population strength of about 50 per cent of Nigeria's population, and worse still, this fall short of equal representation of the female folk in the leadership equation in Nigeria. In a related dimension, PLAC (2018) notes that women's political discrimination in Nigeria and other parts of the world is real and led to the calls at the Fourth International Conference held in Beijing, China in 1995 to demand a shift of attitude towards women in politics. The fact of women's unequal representation in Nigeria's politics, especially since the return of the fourth republic is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Women Representation in the Fourth Republic (1999-2023)

Office	1999-2003	2003-2007	2007-2011	2011-2015	2015-2019	2019-2023
	Available seats	Number of Women	Available seats	Number of Women	Available seats	Number of Women
President	1	0	1	0	1	0
Senate	109	2(2.8%)	109	4(3.7%)	109	9(8.3%)
House of Reps	360	12(3.3%)	360	21(5.8%)	360	25(6.9%)
Governor	36	0	36	0	36	0
State House of Assembly (SHA)	990	24(2.4%)	990	40(3.9%)	990	57(5.8%)
SHA Committee Chairperson	829	18(2.2%)	881	38(3.6%)	887	52(5.9%)
L.G.A Chairperson	710	13(1.8%)	774	15(1.9%)	740	27(3.6%)
Councillors	6,368	69(1.1%)	6,368	267(4.2%)	6,368	235(3.7%)

Sources: Authors' compilation from various sources.

Table 1 show, at a glance, the number of women in elected positions in Nigeria and speaks volumes

about women's gross under-representation in politics in the face of male chauvinism and cultural impediments.

Table 2: Women in Other Positions during Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Vice President, Deputy Senate President, Deputy Governor, Chief Justice etc.

S/N	Positions	1999-2003	2003-2007	2007-2011	2011-2015	2015-2019	2019-2023	2023-2027?
1	Vice President	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	NIL
2	Deputy Senate President	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	NIL
3	Deputy Governor	1 out of 36	2 out of 36	6 out of 36	3 out of 36	4 out of 36	4 out of 36	6 out of 36
4	SFGN	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
5	CJN	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	None as at now

Source: Authors' compilation from various documents. Note: 1. SFGN-Secretary Federal Government of Nigeria; 2. CJN: Chief Justice of Nigeria

The Fourth Republic continues to witness fewer and less number of women in positions of

influence in Nigeria; in some cases, women are not just there at all as showcased by Table 2.

2. A plethora of factors stand in the way of women's political participation. They can be discussed under; socio-cultural and economic factors, political factors, and perception of women in politics, among others.

(i) Socio-cultural and Economic Factors

PLAC (2018) has noted that one of the fundamental obstacles that cause low

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socio-cultural and economic factors. Within the broad range of socio-cultural issues can be distilled:

- (a) Gender and sexual stereotyping where the cultural milieu assigns women social roles that shut them off from active involvement in political affairs. Women are ascribed roles as wives, mothers, and tenders of the male folk, and do not have any business in

politicking as their roles are restricted to sex roles (in the 'other' rooms).

- (b) The patriarchal nature of Nigeria and other African Societies where women are supposed to be under the male folk and take directives and permission from their men.
- (c) Religion: In Nigeria, religion plays an important role in virtually everything that happens, women are enjoined by the Christian and Muslim tenets to be submissive to the male folk. In the north, the practice of *purdah* is a disincentive to women's active political participation.
- (ii) **Economic Factors:** In Nigeria, politics is a very expensive venture and only very

negligible women can afford the cost of politicking in Nigeria. This is arising from the fact that most women are not engaged in very profitable businesses and highly paying jobs to be able to raise the kind of money needed to service political structures in Nigeria. The cost of politics from consultation to the expression of interest is too expensive for the women. For instance, tables 3 & 4 are a summary of the cost of expression of interest forms for PDP & APC in the 2019 and 2023 general elections as well as the money used at the PDP during the 2019 and 2023 at the party convention to persuade delegates to vote for them (see Udoms & Atakpa, 2021, Udoms et al., 2020).

Table 3: Cost of Expression of Interest in 2019 & 2023 General Elections for APC/PDP

S/N	Positions	All Progressives Congress (APC)		Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	
		N	K	N.	K
	President	45,000,000.	00	12,000.	000.00
	Governor	22,000.	000. 00	6,000.	000.00
	Senate	7,000,000.	00	3,000.	000.00
	House of Representatives	3,850,000.	00	2,500,000.	00
	State House of Assembly	850,000.	00	600,000.	00

Source: Udoms et al., (2020)

Table 4: Cost of Lobbying Delegates at the PDP Convention for 2019/2023 Elections by various Candidates

S/N	Election year	Name of Candidate	Amount paid to lobby delegates	Number of delegates lobbied	Total amount paid to delegates
1.	2019	Alhaji Atiku Abubakar	\$5,000	3,221	\$16,105,000
2.	2019	Alhaji Aminu Tambuwal	NA	3,221	NA
3.	2019	Alhaji Bukola Saraki	NA	3,221	NA
4.	2019	Alhaji Rabiun Kwakwanso	NA	3,221	NA
5.	2019	Alhaji Ibrahim Dankwambo	NA	3,221	NA
6.	2019	Alhaji Ahmed Makarfi	NA	3,221	NA
7.	2023	Alhaji Atiku Abubakar	\$20, 000	811	\$16,220,000
8.	2023	Chief Nyesom Wike	\$15,000	811	\$12,165,000
9.	2023	Bukola Saraki	\$10,000	811	\$8,110,000
10.	2023	Aminu Tambuwal	\$10,000	811	\$8,110,000
11.	2023	Udom Gabriel Emmanuel	\$5,000	329	\$1,645,000

Source: Compiled by authors from various newspapers

Note: The PDP national convention for 2023 elections held in Port Harcourt on October 6, 2018 while that of 2023 election held in Abuja on October 30/31 2021 for the selection of the Presidential flag bearer of the party.

(iii). **Political Factors:** The elements that fall under political factors are nature of Nigerian politics, political institutions and structures. The summary of nature of Nigerian politics is as given by Human Rights Watch (1999), Claude Ake (1985) and Ekekwe(1986). According to Human Rights Watch (1999), Nigerian politics revolve around the distribution of oil money in the form of revenue allocation and other avenues of extracting money

In the same dimension, Okoosi-Simbine (2012) identified five factors that constraint women in politics in Nigeria to include:

- a. Method of candidate nomination which is an expensive process as it requires candidates to bankroll campaign activities and other segments of political engagements.
- b. Excessive money politics which is needed to attract political support from necessary stakeholders. In terms of money most female political aspirants do not measure up to their male counterparts.
- c. Party Elders/Political Gatekeepers: Party elders and political gatekeepers exert (undue) pressure in the political processes to the extent that the selection, adoption and presentation of candidates are handled by these elders.
- d. Violence whether real or subtle, threats and intimidations are elements of Nigerian politics which most women may not be able to measure up with the male counterparts.

3. Stigmatisation and Perception of Women Politicians

Women who are actively engaged in politics in Nigeria are often wrongly stigmatised. These women are labelled as free women, cultural rebels and more derogatory labels. On campaign grounds, their male opponents use these wrong

Please note also that in the 2019 convention, apart from the amount allegedly paid by Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, the amount paid by the other candidates is not certain but it is reported that the least amount paid to buy votes was \$1,000 (Udoms et al., 2020).

from the State coffers. In the same vein, Ake (1985) and Ekekwe (1986) submit that the nature of Nigerian politics is more of a struggle for the privatisation of the State, to the benefit of personal and sectional interests. Given this nature, the political processes, elections, events leading to appointments become in the words of Edidem (2019) akin to war and prone to manipulation and violence.

perceptions to blackmail them to the public. Nwabunkeonye (2014) avers that the use of negative labelling, derogatory names and other untoward expressions to describe women in politics is a source of disincentive and discouragement that scares them away from politics.

Conclusion

The issue of women's participation in politics in Africa and Nigeria is an important and delicate subject matter. From the 1995 World Conference on Women held in Beijing to the National gender policy in Nigeria in 2006 that recommended 35 per cent and 30% for women inclusion respectively, it is noted that women are very few in both elective and appointive positions and it calls for concern. Udoms et al., (2020), Atakpa & Udoms (2015) and Udoms et al., (2017) have averred that political exclusion of women in national life and the states amounts to human poverty which has enormous implications on human security and hence national security. To avoid the negative effects of women's political exclusion, there is a need for delicate balancing. The first step must necessarily commence with a cultural attitude to the position of political institutions and structures.

Women have the opportunity to do well in natural life if allowed to contribute. A few women in Nigeria such as the late Prof. Dora Akunyili – former Director General National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and

Control (NAFDAC), and Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, one-time Co-ordinating Minister for Finance and Economy under President Goodluck Jonathan's administration, and now the first black woman to head the World Trade Organisation, have done very well.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the paper, it recommends as follows:

- a. There is a need for aggressive formal education for all women in all regions of Nigeria. Education will not only give women the necessary qualifications but will give them the needed exposure.
- b. There is a need for an endowment fund that will assist women politicians with the necessary funding to engage at all levels of the political processes.
- c. In line with the 30% and 35% affirmative action at the international scene and the Nigerian government, the Nigerian government should cause a bill to be passed into law giving to women at least 30 per cent of both the appointive and elective positions at the Federal and State levels.
- d. The parties in Nigeria should consciously engage in efforts that include the women in

decision-making hierarchies of political parties. Again, appointive and elective positions in the parties should be reserved for women.

- e. Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) and civil society Organisations (CSOs) should set up very pragmatic means of support base for women in politics. This may come in several ways, e.g.
 - (i). Sensitising women on the need to be involved in politics at local, regional and national levels.
 - (ii) Guiding in terms of training vision and performance for women in politics.
 - (iii) Supporting in raising funds to assist women in politics.
 - (iv) Serve as Think-Tanks for women to ensure a high level of productivity in the office.
- f. The Ministry of Women Affairs, Ministry of Information and National Orientation, as well as NGOs, should embark on a re-orientation of the entire society on women's participation in politics. This will help change the public orientation about women in politics and remove the stigmatisation of such women.

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