

## **POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND GENDER INEQUALITY IN NIGERIAN FOURTH REPUBLIC**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Women's participation in politics is a contentious issue in the Nigerian political life. Over the years marginalization has characterized women participation in politics due to various inhibiting social, cultural and religious forces. These forces affected women's perception of politics leading to a very low level of political interest, knowledge and activities of women in politics. Nigeria politics became male - dominated almost making the women virtually politically invisible. However, various moves to inculcate skills and knowledge that will liberate women from abject poverty (socially, economically and politically) are on. These will go a long way to increase and improve women participation in politics in Nigeria. Women are believed to have an exciting political prospect in Nigeria. The issue of inequality has therefore been perceived by different people especially the women folk as an attempt to erode their fundamental rights. In short, Women Participation in Nigerian politics is a topic of importance. Politically, women have been relegated to the background, despite the tremendous effort put forward by government and non-governmental organizations following 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 both in elective and appointive positions. It is worthy to note as revealed by this paper, that Nigerian women are still being marginalized due to the style of leadership inherent in the country. Despite the challenges women are facing, it was discovered that women activism and advocacy, education of women, positivity on the part of successive governments towards women empowerment and interest of women to participate in politics is getting a lot of positive energy. It is therefore, an indication that the participation of women in politics has a bright future. But, this is not without that, relevant stakeholders are advised to advocate for the protection of women from abuse, empower them economically and politically and review the necessary legislations to accommodate the growing interest of women in politics both elective and appointive positions.*

**KEYWORDS:** Political Participation, Politics, Gender Inequality, Sexism, Women in Nigeria.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Gender inequality especially in the political arena is a serious challenge being faced by women in recent times. Gender inequality has been an issue for several centuries, the world over. Though history has it that fewer women have been in power even before colonialism. Instances are the Queen of Daura, the Sarauniya of Zazzau in pre-jihad, the Angwu Tsi who was almost the counterpart of the King, with her own Palace, in the middle belt, Iyayun the Queen who ruled in fifteenth century in Oyo, after the death of her husband (Modupe, 2001). Though from the foregoing, it will be seen that very, very few women have had the opportunity in a

leadership position, yet in every one or single case of women, there are several hundreds of the male counterparts.

Sexism has become a major problem in Nigerian politics. Women have been politically considered endangered species and their low participation in Nigerian government and politics is often associated with culture, religious, economic constraint and male chauvinism. The African society in general and Nigerian society in particular has placed most of the leadership roles on the men folk, thereby championing the course of gender inequality.

Economically, some feminist perceive women's marginality in the conduct and management of the public affairs as arising from their entrenchment of the globalized capitalists relations of production. The traditional society did not recognize the contributions of women in any decision making process. The women are carefully ignored in any important meeting of the family, community and even in government establishments. Till today, community development meetings are always held at night thereby making it impossible for most women to attend.

A relationship, which ensures that majority of Nigerian women are peasants and home makers. Nonetheless, feminists have failed to fundamentally unravel in their explanatory analysis to the feminine gender self-emulating attitudes. Feminine gender-self-destructive factors is the decline of women participation in government and it is often lay in exist analysis, for instance, the 1991 population census put the number of Nigerian women at about 44 million which is almost 50%, and by implication, half of the Nigerian electorates (National Population Census Commission). This electoral power has not been converted to assertive feminine electoral and political advantages over the years (NNCC Report, 1991). In recent past, however, especially in the wake of the millennium and also in the 2015 general elections, many women have risen up to the challenges of the time. Many women have come to assume leadership positions in both politics and religion. This is a giant step in the right direction as it will go a long way in breaking the jinx of gender inequality and male chauvinism in Nigeria society.

The 2015 general elections presented women with good opportunities to navigate the way to power, those in attendance were female legislators, representative of various women's groups, women and male gender activists, the market women's association, professional associations and media practitioners. All these groups of women are after the actualizing the 35% Affirmative Action Committee by President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan.

The 2015 general election was seen as a good platform to authenticate the voting pattern of Nigerian women. It is truly evident the active participation and the support of women to the 2015 campaigns and elections, hence the need for reflection and focused advocacy for the conscious and quality inclusion of women in the structures of the newly elected government and parliament through clear pronouncements and action (AIT's Focus Nigeria, 2015). The objective, which this research work seeks to achieve includes: To assess the nature of women participation in politics, to identify the economic disadvantages associated with the women failure in political participation, to examine the relationship between politics and women's participation in politics, and determine the factors hindering women participation in Nigeria politics.

It is in a bid to find a lasting solution to issue of women's misrepresentation in Nigeria political system which often led many gender activists to demand for the United Nations 35% quota of women representation in all elective position that I intend to pose some few research questions

in a view of obtaining reasonable and positive answers. Thus: What is the level of women participation in Nigeria politics? What is the relationship between politics and women participation in Nigeria politics? What are the factors hindering women participation in Nigeria politics? How can the number of women in Nigeria politics increased?

## LITERATURE ISSUES

Momodu (2003) submits that the issues of women's political participation and representation in politics and governance should be seen from four perspectives. Access, Participation, Representation and Transformation. Access to political institutions, participation (which includes control of power within such institutions), quantitative and qualitative representation and the end result will be social and political transformation in the polity. Women's political empowerment can be enhanced when these four conditions are fulfilled.

The view that women in politics matter is sustained by three reasons: First, politics is an important arena for decision making. Individuals who hold official positions in government get to decide how to allocate scarce resources, such as tax revenues. Politicians make political decisions that may help some people at the expense of others. Decisions by politicians often affect people's individual choices by encouraging some behaviours and outlawing others. Second, political power is a valuable good. Politicians hold power over other social institutions, such as the family. Third, holding a political position is 'to hold a position of authority (Paxton, 2010). Women in positions of authority and power can influence decisions on issues that bother on women and impact positively on the lives of female gender.

Political participation, according to Igwe (2002), is the degree and forms of involvement of the people in governance and related institutions of society, such as the economy and culture. In its active sense, it involves participation in political campaigns and debates, attending caucus or strategy meetings of political parties, voting during elections, standing as candidates for elections, and holding of government and party posts. Okolie's (2004) definition goes beyond this to include freedom of expression, association, right to free flow of communication, influence decision process, and right to social justice. According to him; it also expresses such rights to demand for better social and health services, better working conditions, and increase in wages, amongst others. However, we shall use it here in a very restricted sense to mean involvement in electoral politics only that is, standing as candidates for elections. .

The essence of political participation in any society, either civilised or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and dispensing power to organise society, harness and distribute resources and to influence decision making in line with organised or individual interests (Arowolo and Abe, 2008). All groups (including those of women) seek to influence the dispensation of power in line with their articulated interests as a fundamental motive of political participation.

Women, in their gradual consciousness of state of mind also, in recent times, increasingly seek power equation and distribution and redistribution of resources in their favour.

Although, careful observations have indicated that the involvement of women in Nigerian politics is largely noticeable at the level of voting and latent support. Adeniyi (2003) has identified violence and other forms of electoral conflicts perpetrated and perpetuated by men and male youths as the major barriers confronting and inhibiting women active participation

in Nigerian politics. Arguments are on the increase on the specific role women should play in the society. Opinions are divided on whether the role of women is predominantly in the home fronts or women can also engage in other socio-economic and political activities like their male counterparts. It is, however, believed that while the natural relationship between mother and her child may compel and confine her to sedentary activities, it is also important that such mother should contribute her quota to the development of her family and that of her society at large.

The continuous marginalisation of Nigerian women denies them the opportunity of performing these functions. It is interesting to note that society recognises the value of women as voters in a democratic process, yet they are perceived as incapable of governing, hence their limited acceptance to ascend to the pinnacle of decision -making and participate in the power structures.

According to Guzman (2004) this explains why women access to positions of authority, when they are in a minority, is not necessarily a recipe for greater co-ordination of the interests of women as a whole, and it also explains why they run the risk of having their true needs subsumed into the interests associated with their membership of a particular class, ethnic group, or culture.

The presence of female representatives can contribute to "the feminization of the political agenda" that is the articulation of women's concerns and perspectives in public debates as well as "the feminization of legislation" that is public policies are desired to take into account their effect on women (Dovi, 2006). Most gender issues in a male dominated parliament are either overlooked or get predominantly the male gender perspectives to addressing them. In most cases, the female law maker(s) had to lobby their male counterparts to see reasons why a particular gender bill should be passed.

From historical antecedents we may now advance the cultural belief of some pre-colonial societies with a view to understanding the practical and invaluable roles women played in those societies in the period. This will help us to make or debunk a linkage of limited women participation in politics to tradi-cultural orientation of the people. Asase (2003) noted that among the fundamental factors, which constrains and serves as inhibitions to female participation in politics today is the issue of finance. She also opined that people who do not support the idea of women in politics says that it is wrong for a woman to go out of her way to lobby others. Probably makes, for fund. She might as well kill her political ambition good bye before she starts.

Suleiman (2009) "The minister of women Affairs and social Development," in her reaction to the issue of women empowerment, decried low participation and marginalization of women in Nigeria political system, attributing it to unfavorable political climate in the country. She is addition blamed the situation on violence and male chauvinism prevalent in the political climates, plus lack of financial capabilities, as some of the reasons why Nigerian women are discouraged from contesting elections, resulting in low percentage of women public office holders.

Ogbonna (2009) opined that some of the impediments to participating, contesting and winning elections in the country are money politics and power play that effectively scheme women out. Money has always been seen as major factor in the game politics, along with the relative absence of financial empowerment of women. Besides, there have always been cases of much

violence and assassinations, violent clashes at rallies and sheer thug which are not really welcomed in a women's world.

Asase (2003) equally posited that new obstacle have teamed up with old ones to work against women in governance. Sharia (as a religious and penal code) as being practiced in Zamfara state and some other northern states, for instance, is obviously a drawback to the anticipation of women in politics. Here women are not expected to mix with men in public and separate transportation has been provided for more political relevant roles for women in the polity should not be viewed as at the party. Thus, Mrs. Josephine Anenih was cautious in her response to how Sharia would affect the involvement of Northern women in politics. *"I have spoken to one or two of the governors practicing sharia, and they have assured me that it would not limit the participation of women (in governance) and that if they now say that because of sharia they will not present women candidates we" I deal with that when we get there."*

Ozigbo (1998) in his study noted that the traditional Nigerian society paid particular attention to women education in the home. Thus informal education was geared towards training young girls to acquire good manners and household chores. They were socialized into feminine roles of cooking, home craft child rearing practice and so on. They were saddled with heavy household chores and sent to schools with skepticism and lack of parental support. Boys on the other hand went to school with parental and community support and approval which gave them a feeling of importance and superiority. Knowingly or unknowingly, schools added to the disadvantage through administrative practice, school curriculum, teacher behaviors and classroom environment that reflect societal values on gender. There was this attitude of marrying girls at first opportunity regardless of their ages and feelings because of the fear that girls who waited too long might not find suitable husband. In many parts of the world, females are the victims of educational inequalities. Statistical analysis on access to education shows a disparity between girls and boys, at all levels of education. In African countries, sons receive education before daughters. Even when education is free, parents can only afford to educate some of their children. They may decide to send their sons to school rather than their daughters.

Female education lowers fertility and thereby slows population growth because educated women prefer to have fewer children and smaller family size. Women are largely identified with the transmission of cultural and moral values of the society. A better educated population is likely to contribute not only to a more politically active adult population but also to transmission of political values as well (Okeke, 2000).

To further portray the importance of women education it was pointed out by scholars that *"out of 100 typical American women, 21 years of age (6) will never marry, or the (94) who will marry (33) will see the first marriage end in divorce of the remaining (61) who are married, (46) will outlive their husbands. Thus (85) out of (100) women will be on their own sometimes during their lives"*. Since education is *sin qua non* to individual and national development, and women make up a larger segment of most nations, it suffices to state that any nation that is able to provide her citizens, male and female, without discrimination and biases, all things being equal. Sustainable development of a nation depends, to a large extent on full participation and contribution of every member of the society, not just the male or the educated.

To educationally neglected, a significant proportion of the society (women) could be therefore



disastrous and retrogressive. Hence, Obasanjo (1992) warn that a significant stride in development is unrealistic for any country that marginalizes women who constitute large and important segments of the society.

Finally, if it is gender or sex discrimination, it has to do with the two sexes that is male or female discrimination. However, whenever there is the mention of gender discrimination, what is normally meant is discrimination against women.

Throughout the ages, there has always been bias and prejudice against women in all societies and in all epochs. Discrimination against women is manifested in all spheres of human relations. It has always come in different forms: socio-cultural. Economic, religious, and most importantly, political. Socio-culturally, there have always been several norms and traditions in different societies which prevent women from realizing their full potentials. These are cultures that make them second class citizens and inferior to men. In the traditional society, it was the belief that women's original position was in the kitchen. Education was not considered important for them. Their training was directed towards their natural destiny in marriage, housekeeping, and motherhood. There was practically little opportunity for freedom of expression and choice. The husband's or father's opinion was supreme on every issue, including when it was time for the girl-child to get married. In the economic realm, the same applies. Women in the traditional society were also marginalized.

They were supposed to stay back at home to take care of the house while men went out to work in order to provide for the family. When women contributed, it was in minor areas. This exists to an extent today. From statistics released few years ago by the Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development, Abuja, out of every 100 Nigerian men in paid labour, there are 25 women. This means that the ratio of women to men in paid labour is one to four. Meanwhile, by the census of 2006, women are almost of equal number with men. In religious matters, where we are meant to believe that God created everybody (man and woman) in His own image and likeness, women are also discriminated against. In fact, gender: discrimination in the house of God was institutionalized right from the early days of Christianity. In St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 14:34-35), it is stated in the Bible, that:

*As in all the churches of God's people, the women should keep quiet in the meetings. They are not allowed to speak...they must not be in charge. If they want to find out about something, they should ask their husbands at home. It is a disgraceful thing for a woman to speak in church.*

In other words, a particular sex is created more in the image and likeness of God than the other sex. If not for the religious revolution that occurred in the 20th century, which led to the springing up of the new generation Pentecostal churches, women would still have continued to occupy the back seat in all churches. Even though the orthodox churches have refused to give women prominence in their affairs, so many women today hold sway in some Pentecostal churches as Pastors and Evangelists.

Perhaps, the greatest manifestation of women marginalization is in politics. Despite constitutional declaration of the equal status of both sexes in most countries of the world, gender discrimination remains fully entrenched in the power configuration of the society, with consequences of limiting women's participation in the political process. In Section 42 of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria, for instance, it is expressly stated that Nigerian citizens have the right to freedom from discrimination on the basis of, among other things, sex. In as much as

there is no legal document or government policy that runs contrary to this constitutional provision or puts official stamp on the marginalization of women in politics in the present-day Nigeria, the fact remains that it is fully entrenched in the system, even if unofficially. Otherwise, there would not have been talks on the part of government to redress the imbalance. The point being made here is that it is in recognition of this imbalance that all countries were mandated to allot at least 30% of their elective and appointive positions to women. It is in recognition of this marginalization that Nigeria formulated the National Policy on Women and other such policies. It is also in recognition of this fact that almost all the political parties in Nigeria, during the election into the fourth republic, gave women aspirant's nomination forms free of charge.

Despite the constitutional provisions, local and international declarations of gender equality, and the attempts by government and the political structures to solve the problem of gender imbalance in politics, series of injustices are still always meted out to the womenfolk (sadly by the people, agencies, and structures that claim to have interest in redressing it). These injustices are perfected by the government and the political structures mostly occupied by men. It is all these issues that we intend to examine in the subsequent sections of this paper.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory of sexism according to the new Webster's Dictionary of English Language, sexism is the attitude and institutions, often unconscious, that judge human worthy on the grounds of gender or sex roles or it could be prejudice or discrimination, against women based on their genders.

The proponents of this theory include Karl Marx, Peter Glick, Susan Fiske, Mary Anstell etc. The sexiest theory has the following tenets:

1. Fundamental, physical and psychological differences between men and women, in part, account for the ascribed masculine supremacy and patriarchy in the societies.
2. Cultures and societies are deciders of gender roles.
3. Women oppression is in connection with production.

Fundamental, physical and physiology/biology, differences between men and women, in part, account for the ascribed masculine supremacy, and patriarchy inevitability in societies.

(Mariete S. 2005) Patriarchism is the most crucial form of feminine domination, the legitimacy of which ironically rests upon tradition.

Cultural gender determinants notably Ann Oakley and Sherry Ortner espoused the view that culture and society are the deciders of gender role. In their respective analysis, they opined that culture is the sum total of human societies accumulation of traditions, values, norms prescription of behavior, among other things, over the years of their existence (George, 1990). Accordingly, these legacies are transmitted from generation to generation, and members of a culture determine gender roles, thereby the universal subordinate status of women in politics is historical, having been determined by culture and society, and which members think of as absolute and unchangeable. In essence, the cultural order puts men above women. Accordingly, the order bestows on man, the responsibility to guard the terms and the cultural

foundations up which the development of society and the home is founded, while the women guard the home unity and health as well as the integration of society through rearing, including the nurturing of off-springs when they are young( Abayomi, 2000).

The materialist (Marxist) analysis of the women question takes a different dimension on the feminist question. It examines the status of women in relation to the economic system, rather than the relationship between men and women. The end point is that, women's oppression is in connection with production.

Marxist feminist, consequently focus on housework and its relations to capital arguing that house workers directly under the capitalists, the men (husbands) act as the domestic capitalists or compradors, who subject the housewives to exploitation as the latter's labouring the home including providing services as laundry, cooking, cleaning the environment and child rearing, are not subjected to economic evaluation or monetization and be so rewarded accordingly. Women's oppression will cease to exist, in the projection of George, when class oppression disappears as a result of proletarian revolution, which will invariably emancipate both men and women from capitalist exploitation. Unfortunately, the dream of women liberation and emancipation from men's oppression may not be attainable because of the demise of communism, which had intended to provide the ideological framework and foundation for such revolutionary Putsch by the oppressed workers. Gender theologians in their justifications; rationalize religious injunctions as the determining basis for gender inequality in the society. These theoretical factors are assembly deterministic of the sex roles in the society, and by extension, decide life opportunities and how far each sex can go in the societal scheme of things.

Ambivalent Sexism has two sub-components: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism which means "well-wishing or friendly: Traditionally, only hostile sexism was considered relevant, but recently, a strong stream of research has been conducted to show the detrimental effect of benevolent sexism.

Ambivalent Sexism offers a reconceptualization of the traditional view of sexism to include both subjectively benevolent and hostile feedings toward women. The tradition of the benevolent component is a major contribution because it addresses the interdependence that men and women share.

Benevolent and hostile sexism both reinforce traditional gender roles and preserve patriarchal social structures by sharing the common assumption that women are the weaker sex, the two forms of sexism differ in their expression. Benevolent sexism is defined as subjectively positive attitudes of protection, idealization and affection towards women in traditional roles while hostile sexism is defined as their negative equivalents of domination, degradation, and hostility. Men can hold both types of sexist beliefs without contradicting each other "women need to be protected and women are incompetent at work.

## **Women Participation in Nigeria Politics: Historical Perspective**

### **▪ Pre-Colonial Period**

Prior to their colonial experience, the Nigerian women played active and productive roles in their respective traditional political governance (Akinboye, 2004; Ajayi, 2007). Although women's political participation during pre-colonial era was not equal to that of men, the position of women in governance was complementary rather than subordinate (Mba, 1982;



Nwankwo, 1996 & Ikpe, 2004). Even in the most conservative of societies of Nigeria, women contributed tremendously to the development of their societies (Awe, 1992). In the pre-colonial Nigeria, they occupied important roles in the traditional political life and in their different regions; they were actively engaged in politics and held decision-making roles in the governmental institution in their respective regions (Kamene, 1991). The extent of women's participation in the public sphere in the pre-colonial Nigeria however, depended very much on how their particular society was organized, whether in the form of monarchy like the Yoruba kingdom or as republican like the Igbo tribes (Nwankwo, 1999). The traditional Nigerian society was segregated between genders which enabled the measurement of power and achievements. The complementarities' role of women was however embedded in sex segregation, which determined gender position, status and power in the society and provided them their own spheres of operation and control (Ikpe, 2004). Certain political structures, which allowed for power sharing between men and women were articulated and firmly put in place. Women for instance, had access to political participation through a complex and sophisticated network of relationship, rights and control of power with men in certain societies, their role were complementary or subordinate in others (Olojede, 1990). This however, does not mean that women occupied equal roles with men in the society. There were very few women who possessed political power in the precolonial Nigeria (Awe, 1992). Only very few women were initiated into traditional cults such as Ogboni, Osugbo, Ekpo, Ekpe, Eyo, etcetera. (Ojuolape, 2001) Some notable women in the traditional political governance in the South West Nigeria include the Erelu, Ayaba and Olori (king's Wives', Iyalode (Women's Leader), Iyalaje (Market Women's Leader), Yeye Oba (King's Mother) and Iya-olosa (Goddess priests), Moremi of Ife, Efusetan of Ibadan and Emotan. One cannot undermine the significant role of Iya Afin, Iya Agan and Iya Abiye to the palace administrations of the various kingdoms (Mba, 1982; Nwankwo, 1999) Likewise, the influence and contributions of Queen Amina of Zaria to the political development of the Northern Nigeria's emirate and the achievement of Kambasa of Bony in the dim pre-colonial past are by no means negligible (Awe, 1992). The change of government from the Hausa aristocracy to the Fulani/Muslim hegemony however, totally excluded women from the public sphere. After the reign of Amina in the pre-Islamic past of Zaria, there was no woman who sat in the court of any Hausa ruler (Abubakar, 1992). Islam made strict division of the spheres for the different genders. Women were not to be seen in the public spheres (Modo1996). Women's participation in public life in Benin Empire was limited (Ikpe, 2004). There was no women representation among the various grades of chiefs. Men dominated the different craft guilds and even controlled the markets as agents of the Benin King. The only important female political figure was the Iyaoba (King's Mother) with her court at Uselu. She did not sit in the Oba's council and as such did not take part in decision making. Some of them, such as Iyaoba Idia, reputed to have contributed personally to the success of Esiegie's campaigns against Idah, were powerful and contributed to the successful reign of their sons (Ikpe, 1997). They however, did not act as spokespersons for women in Benin. In the riverine Igbo societies such as Onitsha, Asaba, Osomari and Illah, there was the institution of the queen, the Omu. Though the Omu wielded great authority in the society among the women, her position was based on loyalty to the Obi (king), thus limiting the power of the office (Ekejiuba, 1992). Nevertheless, the administrations of the community's affairs in the Igboland was not without due consultation between the men and women groups (Nwankwo, 1999; Ajayi, 2007). Despite the lack of sufficient literature and history that captures the relevance of women in that era and the fact that conventional African history provides only fragmentary images of women, the pre-colonial Nigeria though a patriarchal society, women were not completely left out of the political scene (Ojo, 2003; Olojede, 1990 & Nwankwo, 1999). However, the coming of Westernization destroyed their political positions and then marginalized them in the modern

political institutions (Allen, 1972; Sadiqi, 2000)

### ▪ Colonial period

Women's poor participation in politics, like many other problems in Nigeria, has a deep root in the system carved and imposed by colonialism (Omotola, 2007; Lewu, 2005). It began with the colonial occupation, starting with the fusion of the three regions (Yoruba in the southwest, the Igbo in the southeast, and the Hausa/Fulani in the North) to the Nigeria's independence and its governance, and then to the post independent Nigeria (Mba, 1982). Colonialism played a significant role in the political participation of women in Nigeria. The advent of colonialism and its attendant political and economic subjugation subsequently entrenched the masculinity of politics and subordinated the women under the men (Ikpe, 2004). Colonial administration created a patriarchy government in which women were not allowed to hold any authoritative positions (Kamene, 1991). Thus, the lack of recognition of the Nigerian women political/leadership role in the mainstream politics in Nigeria today is traceable to colonial invention (Allen, 1972). Colonial administration restructured the feminine relevance in governance by divesting the women of their political powers (Ajayi, 2007). This was exacerbated by the policy introduced in which men were believed to have the potential of activeness in the society; and those that were lucky to receive some education got recruited into the colonial overlords. The colonial administration gender policies eroded female participation both in politics and economy as women were denied both electoral and job opportunities (Mba, 1982; Olojede, 1999 & Ikpe, 2004). This practice, to a large extent, served to reinforce and generalize patriarchal values in the country and significantly marked the beginning of low participation of the females in the formal agencies of government, a phenomenon that has continued till date (Enemu, 1999). In fact a section of the women in South Western Nigeria voted for the first time in the nation's electoral history in the 1959 general elections, while their Northern counterparts were disenfranchised and it was not until 1976, fifty-four years after the elective principle was introduced to Nigeria, that the Northern women first enjoyed franchise rights (Ajayi, 2004). In furtherance of the colonial masters' attempt to restructure the traditional African economies in order to make them ready market for European manufacturers and sources of cheap raw materials for their factories, only men were granted economic power in the production of export crops while the women were left to concentrate on the production of food crops (Akiyode-Afolabi & Arogundade, 2003). All these have resulted in gender insensitivity in the design and implementation of public policy and have significantly assisted in perpetuating gender inequality in various gamut of social life. At the same time, the masculinity of politics was so entrenched that the machinery put in place during the colonial period systematically rendered women invisible as they were considered unsuitable for the rigours of public life; hence they were not allowed to vote, to contest elections, to sit in parliament or to be employed in the civil service (Akinboye, 2004). Despite the alienation of women from the mainstream of Nigerian politics during colonial administration, the Nigerian womenfolk made it relevant by its contributions to nationalist movements, which constituted vanguards against the colonial administration. Women political activism dates back to 1929/30 Aba women riot against colonial tax policies. The Ngwa women's opposition against the municipalisation of their community in 1954, the Eastern Region women's opposition to new school fees in 1958; and the series of protests between 1946 and 1958 by the Abeokuta Women's Union led by Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti were invaluable in the country's struggle for independence (Nwankwo, 1996:16). A major landmark achievement in the political development of women during the colonial era was the formulation of a women's political party in 1944 spearheaded by Mrs. Oyinkan Abayomi (Ojo, 2003; Akiyode-Afolabi, 2003). At the

individual levels however, women, notably including Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Margaret Ekpo, Gamboare Sawaba, participated in the anti-colonial political struggle, and took part in the negotiations for independence (Akiyode-Afolabi & Arogunde, 2003). However, the limited gains made by women did not translate into participation in decision making during this colonial period. Men dominated in the first political parties while actively depending on material and mobilization support from women. The Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), and Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) garnered varying levels of support from women's groups. However, women did not feature prominently in the leadership of these and other parties during the nationalist era and after independence (Ahonsi-Yakubu, 2001). In the 1958 elections only Wurola Esan got appointed to the Senate of 36 members, while no woman was elected to the 312-member House of Representatives and none was in the federal cabinet (Nwankwo, 1996).

### ▪ Postcolonial period

The low participation of women in politics was also fostered by the nature of postcolonial politics. Though women's political participation witnessed a rising trend but showed a disturbing low profile participation in political development of Nigeria state (Aina, 2004). The acrimonious politics of the post-independence era was detrimental to women's participation. Politics and political parties became ethnic, paternalistic and personality based. Women were expected to support politicians from their own ethnic area without any consideration whatsoever for their personal interests (Ojo, 2003). As party and ethnic allegiance became more important than gender solidarity, women lost their power of collective action, which was important in their agitations during the colonial era (Ikpe, 2004). From 1960 -1965 there were only two female legislators in the federal parliament and three others in the Eastern House of Assembly (Nwankwo, 1996, Omotola, 2007). Four female legislators in the whole of the country were a number that was so negligible as to give women the necessary influence over decision-making. The imposition of military, an era that followed this period from 1966 did not foster the participation of women in politics and very little was heard of women at the helm of affairs (Miki, 2003). Military rule was an all-male affair and while it lasted women played only a peripheral role (Adeleke, 2002). No woman was appointed military governor even though there were some qualified women in the military set-up. However, in 1967, when Nigeria was divided into 12 states, 1 woman was appointed each as commissioners into East Central and Lagos, while Oyo state had two women commissioners (Nwankwo, 1996). The Constituent Assembly of the Obasanjo regime in 1975 had no single female members out of its 50 members (Babatunde, 2003). It was the era of military dictators who had little regards for the muchcherished constitutional interest balancing. It also disturbed the proper functioning of women organization as pressure groups since they were banned. Women did not feature prominently during the preparations made by the Murtala/Obasanjo regime for returning power to civilians. No woman was appointed to the fifty-member Constitutional Drafting Committee, very few women were elected into the local government councils during the 1976 elections, and only Mrs. Janet Akinrinade was elected to the Constituent Assembly. Four other women were appointed to the 250 member assembly. The second republic did not witness any significant difference with respects to women political participation despite renewed efforts to give women a chance to contribute to national development (Anifowose, 2004). Although from 1979, women have made desperate efforts to enter into representative politics but with little success, women recorded low representation in the Senate, the House of Representative and the States House of Assembly. Only 3 ministers, 1 out 96 senators and 11 out of a total of 450 members of the House of Representatives were female (Aina, 2004). In all the 19 states of the

federation, there was no female representation in all the State Houses of Assembly, neither was there a female chairperson nor councilor at the local government level (Omotola, 2007). With the collapse of the second republic, women again fizzled out of relevance in the two-year regime of Gen Mohammed Buhari (Adeleke, 2002). From the mid-1980s however, the military started appointing a few women now and then to positions of authority. Thus the coming of Gen Ibrahim Babangida in 1985 changed the attitude of military rulers to women leadership. One important aspect of the rising profile of women in political life was the phenomenon of First Lady Syndrome (Aina, 2004). This however was nothing but mere personal aggrandizement (Babatunde, 2003). Under these auspices, the Better Life for Rural Women was created and was later renamed Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) by the succeeding First Lady.

### **Women Participation in Nigeria Politics: Analytical Perspective**

Even with the affirmative action of 35% representation of women in political and non elective positions in Nigeria, the number of women in the legislative houses is not encouraging as a result of the patriarchal dominance of the men in Nigeria.

In the elective positions in Nigeria since 1999, it is evident that women have not reached 10% representation. From 1999 till date, no woman has been vice president of Nigeria and not to talk about president. In 2011, only one woman contested for the post of the president in Nigeria under the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party and she did not survive the primary election. How could she survive the primaries when she got only one vote despite the large number of women that attended the primary election but refused to vote for her even on sympathy bases. In 2015, 5 women out of the 14 persons contested the vice presidential position while 14 men contested the post of president.

Aiyede (2006) had noted that the number of women in political offices has improved over the years, and is still likely to increase in future, but that the fact remains that the degree of improvement remains marginal. This is exactly what happened in the 2007 elections. Though, there was a little improvement, not much was achieved in redressing the imbalance. The tables below depict this.

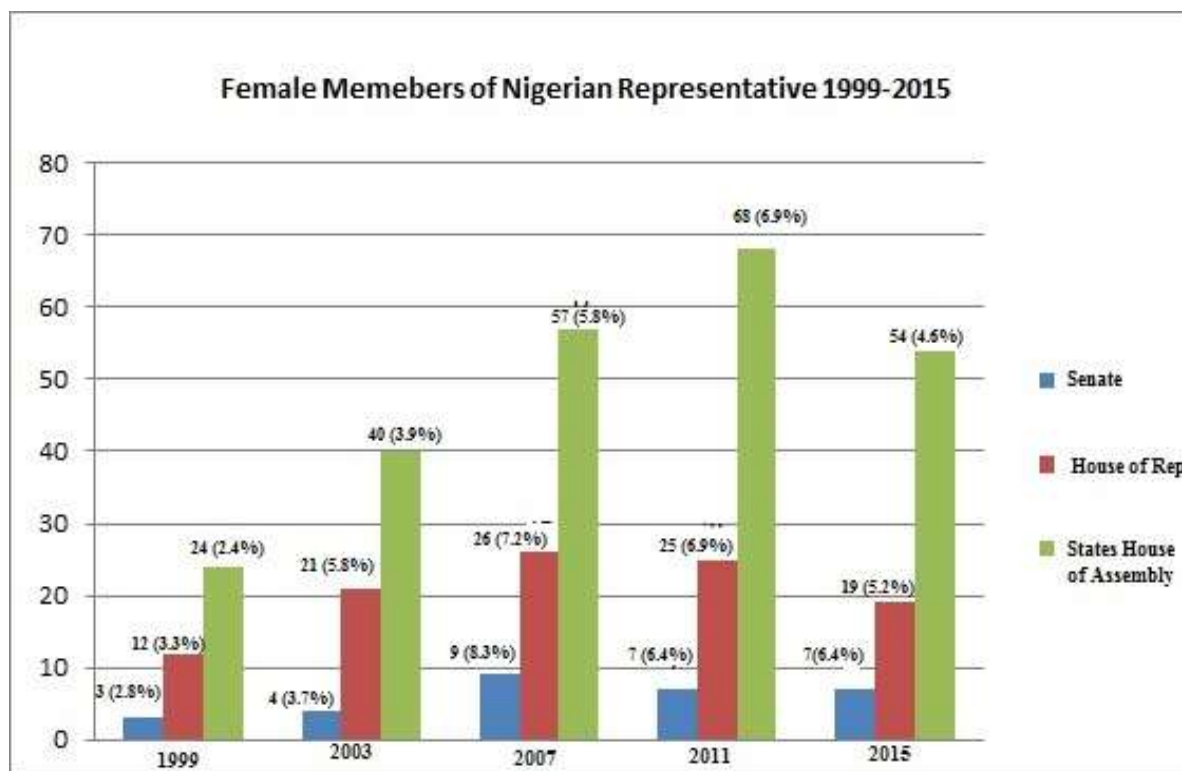
**Table1: Distribution of female Elected between 1999 - 2015 in Nigeria**

S/n	Position	No. Available seats	No. Of women in 1999	No. Of women in 2003	No. Of women in 2007	No. Of women in 2011	No. Of women in 2015
1	Presidency	1	0	0	0	0	0
2	Senate	109	3(2.8%)	4(3.7%)	9(8.3%)	7(6.4%)	7(6.4%)
3	House of Representative	360	12(3.3%)	21(5.8%)	26(7.2%)	25(6.9%)	19(5.2%)
4	Governorship	36	0	0	0	0	0
5	36 States House of Assembly	990	24(2.4%)	40(3.9%)	57(5.8%)	68(6.9%)	54(4.6%)
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1532</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>80</b>

Source: Authors Work 2018.

Table 1: Female Members of Nigeria Representative between 1999-2015





*Source: Authors work 2018*

The marginal increase of women since 1999 as shown in the table and graph above depict insignificantly and with attendant implications for governance. Martin (2015) rightly observes that if the women overcome the many barriers of a very un-level playing field and succeed in being elected, they face the new challenges of life in a well established “gentlemen’s” club that shuts the door on equal participation in parliament and it’s decision-making. The argument is that few women in political decision-making authority will not be able to influence policy especially those that have gender implications. The few women in most cases are unwilling to challenge patriarchal structure of authority and domination.

Till date men dominate most public offices. The general elections held in the country in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 saw only few women elected into various offices. Several women contested both the gubernatorial and presidential elections but none has ever won. In 1999, out of 1990 contestable seats in the 36 houses of Assembly, men occupied 88.6 % leaving only 24 seats for women, a percentage of 2.4%. An improvement came in 2003 with women having 40 seats out of 990 seats representing 3.9%. In year 2007, women occupied 57 seats out of a total of 990 with a percentage of 5.8%. In the House of Representatives, in 1999, out of total 360 seats, women won 12 representing 3.3%. In 2003, men occupied 318 out of 339 leaving women with only 21 seats, a percentage of 5.8%. The number increased in 2007 as women occupied a total of 25 seats, a percentage of 6.9%. In 2011 and 2015, there were significant drop in the number of successful candidates into the House of Representatives. Out of 360 available seats, women won only 19 (5.2%) and in 2015, women had 19 seats at 5.2%. In Senate in 1999, women occupied 3 seats out of total of 109 (2.8%). In 2003, the number of women increased to 4 (3.7%) as men occupied 105 seats out of 109 seats. In 2007 women occupied 9 seats out of 109 seats, a percentage of 8.3%. In the year 2011, out of the 109 senators who emerged



winners at the polls, only 7 (6.4%) were women and in 2015, women stands at constant rate of 7(6.4%).

These figures for 2003–2007 are indications of gradual improvement but a poor representation of about 75 million women in the country. More worrisome is the drop in the number of successful female candidates in 2011 and 2015 elections.

### **Major Challenges upsetting Women Participation in Nigerian Politics**

The poor participation of women in politics and governance has been a major concern at the global level. In Nigeria, the number of women participating in politics is not proportionate to the 50% of the nation's population which they represent, and has not translated into equal representation in political leadership positions. Rising global focus on issues of gender equality, aided by calls such as that of goal three of the Millennium Development Goals, is bridging the gap created by long-term discriminations against women, and helping to make women more visible in politics. In this context, Nigeria has recognised women in the political sphere, and included them in both appointive and elective positions.

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

**1. Patriarchy:** It refers to a society ruled and dominated by men over women, which in turn has given rise to women being looked upon as mere household wives and non-partisans in decision making process in households not to talk of coming out to vie for political positions.

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

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

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

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

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

**7. Political Godfatherism** is one of the concepts that open narrow doors when it comes to deciding who gets what in the political scene. However, it has effect on women participation

in Nigeria politics. Literarily because Godfathers are seen in Nigeria to be men who have the power personally to determine both who gets nominated to contest elections and who wins an election. Godfathers are people of questionable wealth and influences who robbed political parties of their conventional and legitimate functions of presenting clear and coherent programmes on the basis of which the candidates presented by them are chosen by the voters.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The increasing global campaigns by women's movements for gender equality have raised popular consciousness and intense academic discourse on the poor participation of women in politics across the globe. Since sustainable democratic government relies upon the participation of all citizens in determining through elections and political processes, who governs them, the imperative of women's involvement in political and human development cannot be over emphasized. Despite the increasing agitation for gender equality all over the world however, for years, women record poor participation in politics and decision making positions. This is despite the fact that women constitute about half of the world's population.

The dismal participation of women in Nigeria's political development became a worrisome phenomenon when after four consecutive successful legitimate change of government through democratic electoral process following the nation's return to civilian regime in 1999; Nigeria fails to achieve the critical mass of 30% women's representation in the National Assembly. Like other countries in the world, women constitute half of the Nigeria's population, yet this numerical strength of Nigerian women does not translate to increase in women's participation in political activities in the country. The following should form parts of the recommendations of this paper;

There should be a reformation of customary and religious institutions of the states so as to avoid discrimination against women's involvement in public life. The patriarchal structures that reinforce power imbalance between women and men should be dismantled.

Government should partner with women's movements and civil society to embark on aggressive awareness and enlightenment campaign towards changing societal perception that women are inferior to men.

Education of women is useful to destroy inferiority complex and to give aspiring women courage and confidence to compete with men. Women education should target the adult population both in the cities and rural areas.

In addition, the creation of a political environment supportive of and conducive for women's participation is a responsibility of the government. Therefore, government must curb the culture of electoral violence and the use of political thugs and gangsters to suppress and witch-hunt political opponents in the country. Election Task Force should be established by the government with membership drawn from the Nigerian Police and other law enforcement Agencies

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