

## **WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN NIGERIAN POLITICS: A CRITICAL EVALUATION**

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**ABSTRACT:** This work examined women representation in Nigerian politics with emphasis on elective positions, from 1999 to 2015. The specific objectives of this work are to find out the level of improvement in women representation in Nigerian politics and identified the factors that contributed to the low representation and participation of women in Nigerian politics. The liberal feminist theory was adopted as the framework for analysis. In the methodology, data for the study were generated using secondary sources and analyzed with an aggregate of qualitative and quantitative method. The study discovered that there is no significant improvement in the level of women representation in politics in the elective positions from 1999 to 2015. In addition, the issues of political violence, cultural and religious factors, poor funding, high rate of illiteracy, problem of internal party democracy, etc, are the challenges to women representation and participation in Nigerian politics. The paper recommends the need for political will towards the implementation of affirmative action; provision of adequate securities before, during and after election; effective political education and socialization of the public, abrogation of repugnant laws and any discriminatory practices etc.

**Keywords:** *Politics, Women, Political Participation, Political Representation*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The attainment of sustainable development and democracy requires the presence of high level of citizens' participation. This participation must require equal participation for gender in politics. Therefore, the active participation of women is very essential for growth or development of democracy in any society or state. Without the active participation of women in all levels of decision making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved (Oni, 2009). Women's participation in politics cannot be over emphasized and is of strategic importance for women's empowerment, which also can lead to wider benefits (Idowu, Olaniyan & Idowu, 2015).

Political participation, which is the involvement of citizens in decision making, governance and selection of leaders has been very essential for the sustenance and development of democracy. This is because effective participation of the citizens can generate good governance (like transparency and accountability), development, protection of fundamental human rights, development of political consciousness etc in a society.

Women make of more than half of the world's population and have played several significant roles in the development of societies which include role of mother, producer of goods and

services, home manager, political activist, community development. However, throughout history, these contributions and achievement are silent and neglected which creates the perception that women are invisible (Egwu, 2015; Idowu et al, 2015).

The cause of increasing the level of women participation in politics has led to emergence of several women movement, conferences or organizations aimed at fighting against gender discrimination and inequality. These include the formation of Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); United Nations Development Funds for Women in 1985; organization of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 held in Beijing; the establishment of New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) etc. All of these set to increase the level of women participation and representation in politics.

The women participation in Nigerian politics can be traced back to the pre-colonial times. For example in Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria, women actively participated in community affairs that have had bearings on their lives, (like the Umu-Ada). In Yoruba land, women also participated in decision making; in the North, there are records of the role of Queen Amina of Zaria, Princess Moremi of Ife, the famous Idia of Benin, Princess Inikpi of Igala, Iyalode Efunsetan Amwura of Ibadan (Egwu, 2015).

In the colonial period, there were introduction of several structural changes that create further barriers to women participation in politics and these changes brought enormous impact on the existing socio-economic relations particularly between men and women, which diminished the level of women's visibility in political sphere in Nigeria. These issues led to disempowerment, deprivation, seclusion, and marginalization of women in the colonial period (Egwu, 2015). This led to several protests like the Aba Women Riot of 1929. During this period, there was formation of pressure groups like Women's Party in 1944, Abeokuta Ladies Club that later changed to Abeokuta Women's Union in 1946 and also changed to Nigeria Women's Union in 1949. Also, few women also contested election like Margeret Ekpo in 1953/1954, Lady Aboyemi, Mrs. Kuti, Miss Young and Mrs. Femi Pearse (Mba, 1982 as cited in Egwu, 2015).

The low participation of women in politics particularly in the Third World countries has brought a lot of debates and concerns among political and policy analysts. Despite the several reforms and measures adopted against gender inequality and discrimination in political position, women in Nigeria continued to experience low level of participation and representation most especially in the elective positions and decision making of government and this has posed a great problem for sustainable development and democracy in Nigeria.

Therefore, this paper is set to examine the women representation in Nigerian politics with particular emphasis on elective positions from 1999 to 2015. Specifically this paper set to ascertain the extent of the improvement of women representation in elective position in Nigeria; identify the factors posing a challenge to women representation and participation in Nigeria and suggest appropriate measures on how to ensure improvement on the level of women representation and participation in politics in Nigeria.

## Conceptual Clarifications

### Politics

Hague and Harrop (2010) defined politics as “the activity or process by which groups reach and enforce binding decisions affecting the collectivity as a whole.” Therefore, the process of trying to arrive at a particular decision between group involves element of politics. Ekemam (2013) sees politics as the “art of resolving contradictions or conflicts for the purpose of serving human socio-economic interest.” This means that the process of achieving a peaceful co-existence in a society also requires politics. In the same vein, Heywood (2007) viewed that politics is an activity which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live”... is thus inextricably linked to the phenomenon of conflict and cooperation.”

Williams (1980 as cited in Azubike, 2015) views politics in two perspectives: first as a discreditable activity whose virtue is the competitive pursuit of private interests and secondly, as the administration of the common affair of the public, a matter of universal rather than particular concern whose aim is defining and promoting the common goods. In similar vein, Appadorai (1974) says that politics is “science which is concerned with the state and of the condition essential for its existence and development.” This shows that politics is concerned with the way of governing to achieve development or common goods.

Johari (2009) viewed that politics involves three connotations:

1. Political activity which means that efforts by which conditions of conflict are created and resolved.
2. Political process which involves those agencies that have the role in the decision making process.
3. Political power which means the capacity of an individual or groups to influence and modify the conduct or behavior of others.

Heywood (2007) went further to observe that politics involves different perspectives:

1. Politics as the art of government that governs the affairs of the people.
2. Politics as public affairs, which concerns public life.
3. Politics as compromise and consensus which consists on dialogue, debates and making of agreement of issues or policies.
4. Politics as power and distribution of resources. This means that politics involves the use of power in order to allocate resources to different sectors, people in the society.

### Political Participation

Madosk (cited in Esidene & Abdul, 2013) defined political participation as the kind of activities involved that allow members of the society to share direct and indirect selection of rulers in the formation of public policies. Falade (2014 as cited in Azubike, 2015) sees political participation

as the involvement of the citizens in the political system. Hague and Harrop (2010) defined political participation as any of the many ways in which people can seek to influence the competition or policies of their government.

In another perspective, Unanka (2004) gave a more clarity on political participation as the involvement in political activities, ranging from listening to political talks and taking part in decision making to involvement in the execution of political violence. This means that political participation involves both legal and illegal activities or participation. Axford et al (2002 as cited in Eme & Onuigbo, 2015) maintained that the definition of political participation is far from only on the aspect of a voluntary action through which people seek to influence the public policy making and they viewed that political participation can be in form of coerced action. Eme and Onuigbo (2015) see political participation as a wide spectrum of activities that take different forms depending on the political culture of a given nation. They argued that whether an activity is conventional or unconventional depends on a nation's political culture, legal framework and socialization process.

From the above definitions, political participation can be in form of conventional/ legal participation and unconventional/ illegal participation. In addition, political participation can be in either active or passive. The conventional political participation include: voting in election, campaign in election, indulging in decision making or policy making, involving in governance etc. while the unconventional participation include: demonstrations, use of violence, falsification of election results, hijack of ballot boxes etc. In this work we see political participation as the involvement in contest for elective positions in Nigeria

### **Political Representation**

Political representation is seen as the political activities undertaken in representative democracies where by citizens are elected to political office on behalf of their fellow citizens who do not hold political office (Representation, 2017). In this work, we see political representation in terms of descriptive representation which focuses on where elected representative or persons work on behalf of the people that possess the same characteristics either in terms of gender, geography, ethnicity, occupation etc. It is where the elected individual represents the descriptive characteristics that are politically relevant like area of birth, occupation, ethnicity, gender etc (Representation, 2018).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The work makes use of theory of liberal feminism. This theory is one of the variants of feminist theory/ approach. It traces back to the Ancient Greeks and China. However, it was not recognized as a developed political theory until the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's work: "A Vindication of the Right of Women (1792) which was the first work generally called "Feminist" (Heywood, 2007; Mbah, 2006; Sergeant, 2009). This theory believes that to increase the status of women there is need to allow women participation in public life or politics.

This theory is interested in improving the status of women around the world, increasing access to power (Stean *et al*, 2010). This theory holds that the root causes of women's oppression lie in women lack of equal civil rights and educational opportunities (Kendall, 2010). This means that the subordination, oppression is associated with presence of unequal distribution or lack of access to rights and opportunities in the society. The liberal feminist school views that female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that block women's entrance and success in political sphere. And the need for political and legal reforms is relevant for increasing women participation in politics.

The relevance of this theory is that it will help us to explain the causes of women's subordination, low representation and participation in politics in Nigeria. In addition, it helps to show that encouragement of women through removal of socio-cultural, legal barriers will enhance women level of participation and representation Nigerian politics.

### **Methodology**

The research design of this work is both historical and descriptive because the researcher traced the women representation in politics from 1999 to 2015 elections and described and analyzed the rate of women representation in elective position in Nigeria. In this paper, data were sourced through secondary sources such as Journals, textbooks, abstracts etc. The analysis was done with qualitative mainly with logical reasoning and quantitative method with simple percentage. The scope of this paper focused on women representation and participation in the Fourth Republic from 1999 to 2015 elections. It is restricted to elective positions in House of Representative, Senate, President, Vice President, Governors, Deputy Governors and State House of Assembly.

### **Women Representation in Nigerian Politics**

In this section, we took time to analyze the level of women political representation in Nigeria and to show whether there have been any improvement in representation of women in elective position. The table below will help us to explain women political representation in Nigeria from 1999 to 2015.

**Table 1: Showing the women representation in 1999, 2003, 2011 and 2015 elections**

S/N	Positions	Number of available seats	Number and % of women elected in 1999	Number & % of women elected in 2003	Number & % of women elected in 2007	Number & % of women elected in 2011	Number & % of women elected in 2015
1	President	1	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
2	Vice President	1	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
3	Senate	109	3 (2.75%)	4 (3.7%)	8 (7.33%)	7 (6.4%)	8 (7.33%)
4	House of Reprs.	360	12 (3.33%)	21 (5.83%)	23 (6.23%)	26 (7.2%)	14 (3.8%)
5	Governor	36	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0(0%)
6	Deputy Governor	36	0 (0%)	2 (5.55%)	6 (16.6)	1 (0.09)	4 (11.1%)
7	Stat house of Assembly	990	12 (1.2%)	38 (3.84%)	54 (5.45%)	68 (6.9)	43 (4.34%)

**Source:** Eme and Onuigbo (2015), Nwauzor, (2016)

The above table indicates that the percentage of women in all elected positions is very low from 1999 to 2015 general election. In the position of the President and vice President, it shows that no woman has been elected, from 1999 to 2015. In the Senate, it shows that women representation was 2.75% in 1999; 3.7% in 2003; 7.33% in 2007; 6.4% in 2011 and 7.33% in 2015 general elections. In the lower chamber (House of Representatives), the women representation comprised of 3.35% in 1999; 5.53% in 2003; 6.38% in 2007; 7.2% in 2011 and 3.8% in 2015.

In governorship position from 1999 to 2015, there is no women representation while Deputy Governorship had produced 0% in 1999; 5.55% in 2003; 16.6% in 2007; 0.09% in 2011 and 11.1% in 2015. Furthermore, in State Houses of Assembly, the percentage of women representation was 1.21% in 1999; 3.84% in 2003; 5.45% in 2007; 6.9% in 68% and 4.34% in 2015.

In the table above, we observed that from 1999 to 2007, women representation in every elective positions (except Presidency) increased while from 2007 to 2011, there was also an increase of women representation in the House of Representative (23 to 26) and State Houses of Assembly (54-68). However, in the Senate, Presidency, Governorship, Deputy Governorship there was no improvement in women representation from 2007 to 2011. In 2015 election, there was

improvement in the Senate from (7 to 8) and Deputy Governorship (1 to 4). While in other elective positions in 2015, there was no improvement. This is because there was decline of number of women in the State Houses of Assembly (68-43), House of Representatives (26-14) and others.

From the result generated from the above table, it indicated that there has not been any significant improvement of women representation in elective positions in Nigeria because from 1999 to 2015 election, women representation in all the elective positions has not been up to 8%.

### **Challenges to Women Representation and Participation in Nigerian Politics**

The poor performance of Nigeria women from 1999 to 2015 general elections which led to low level of women representation in elective positions is associated with several challenges:

**1. Poor Implementation of the Affirmative Action:** The lack of implementation of 35% affirmative action for political position reserved for women contributes to low participation and representation of women in politics. Esomchi and Akoji (2016, p. 839) argued that “framing of the specification of the affirmative action is not the problem in the elimination of gender bias. It is however, the critical question of lack of implementation. And this appears to be a mosaic affecting virtually all nations’ states of the world in terms of the place of women in both elective and appointive offices.” Furthermore, the empirical work of Omenka (2017) indicated that “the implementation strategies of the 35% affirmative action are not adequately enhanced to increase women’s political participation in Nigeria.

**2. Issue of Political Violence:** The issue of electoral violence has played a role in discouragement of women participation in politics in Nigeria. “The involvement of thugs before, during and after elections and the attendant insecurity like destruction of lives and properties makes politics something out-of-the-way for most women. (Ngara & Ayabara, 2013). Safir and Alam (2015) added that despite the commendable achievement of 2015 general election, Nigeria is not free from violence and women face significant gender based vulnerabilities. A female aspirant, called Dorathy Nyone stated that “a ward chairman was short dead; all the women and most of the men fled the scene. My husband rushed there and took me home. I was scared; men who were fully prepared for the violence were the only ones who remained behind to hand pick the various winners” (Ngara & Ayabam, 2013, p. 53). Therefore, the higher there is political violence, the higher the tendency for women to avoid participation in politics and higher reduction in women representation in political position.

**3. Cultural or Religions Factors:** The cultures that guides the way people live in Nigeria affect women representation in politics. The overall impact of cultural norms and practices has entrenched a feeling of inferiority in women and place them at a disadvantage. About 270 different tribes in Nigeria have the belief that women position is at home and women have been regarded as a property and house wife (Esomuchi & Akoji, 2016). Most especially, the women in the Muslim sect will find it very difficult to participate in politics because of the seclusion of women that disallowed women to move unnecessarily. And, where this seclusion was allowed,

goes a long way to prevent women from actively pursuing her economic and personal goals (Esomuchi & Akoji, 2016; Akpan, 2015).

**4. Social Stereotypes/Perception of the Society:** The way society views the role of women in politics contributes to low representation and participation of women in politics. The social stereotypes and perverse notions about women in politics have led to a sort of stigma associated with seeking or holding a political office. Women or female politicians are normally seen as prostitute, divorces, marital failures etc. This perception damages the ambition of women seeking to join politics (Okorie, 2016).

**5. Problems Associated with Internal Party Democracy:** Lack of internal democracy in most of the political parties has to a large extent negated active political participation of the women and frustrates women representations at the party level. (Esomuchi & Akoji, 2016). This is evident on the conduct of primaries in different political parties where the number of women who scaled through was very low in the last election as compare to number of women that contested. Another problem is the issue of consensus among party leaders in selection of candidates which does not give room for women because the party executive is male dominated (Akpan, 2015). This issue will make women to find it difficult to compete for elective position.

**6. Problem of Funding:** This is another crucial factor that posed a problem to women representation and participation in Nigerian politics. The study conducted by Omenka (2017) discovered that “poverty rate affected the implementation of the 35% affirmative action policy in Nigeria to the extent that the higher the poverty rate, the lower the level of women political participation and representation. In addition, Ngara and Ayabam (2013) stated that generally poor financial disposition of women in Nigeria is a serious militating factor which account in the most part for women’s defeat. The lack of financial muscles has placed women folk either as subordinate player in the political game. Most of the Nigerian women live below the poverty line and have no money to finance for electoral campaign.

**7. Low Level of Education:** In a situation whereby most women are not well educated, it will affect how the women will participate in politics. Majority of women in Nigeria lacks formal education and this accounts for low representation of women in politics. (Ngara & Ayabam, 2013; Omenka, 2017). Omenka (2017) further noted that literacy rate affects the implementation of the 35% affirmative action policy in Nigeria, to the extent that the higher the literacy rate, the higher the level of women participation and vice-versa. This implies that low level of women education discourages them for contesting in election.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Women are very essential for the development of any state. The women have since immemorial has contributed immensely to the socio-economic, political, cultural and religious development of nation-state. Therefore, this paper critically analyzes the women representation in Nigerian politics from 1999 to 2015. It has been observed that despite the formation of affirmative action, there has not been any significant improvement on the rate of women representation in elective



positions in Nigeria. The challenge of achieving adequate representation of women in politics is as a result of poor implementation of the affirmative action, insecurity/political violence, cultural and religious factors, illiteracy and poor funds etc. To ensure the improvement of women representation in Nigerian politics, some adequate measures must be put in place:

- i. There is need for proper political education of the women on the need to participate in politics.
- ii. The Nigerian government must have the political will to implement the 35% affirmative action so that more women will be given the opportunity to contest for election.
- iii. There is need for provision of adequate security, before, during and after elections. This is because insecurity/violence discourages women to participate in politics.
- iv. Political parties in Nigeria must restructure their operations in terms of selection of candidate. This can be done by ensuring internal party democracy and inclusion of more women in leadership positions in the party.
- v. There is urgent need to empower the women economically in order to ensure high level of women representation in politics.
- vi. There is need to encourage participation of more women in the community in terms of formulation and execution of developmental projects.
- vii. There is need for the government to abrogate all laws that are discriminatory to women and repugnant to natural justice.
- viii. There is need for the political parties to give waiver to women in payment of nomination fees.

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